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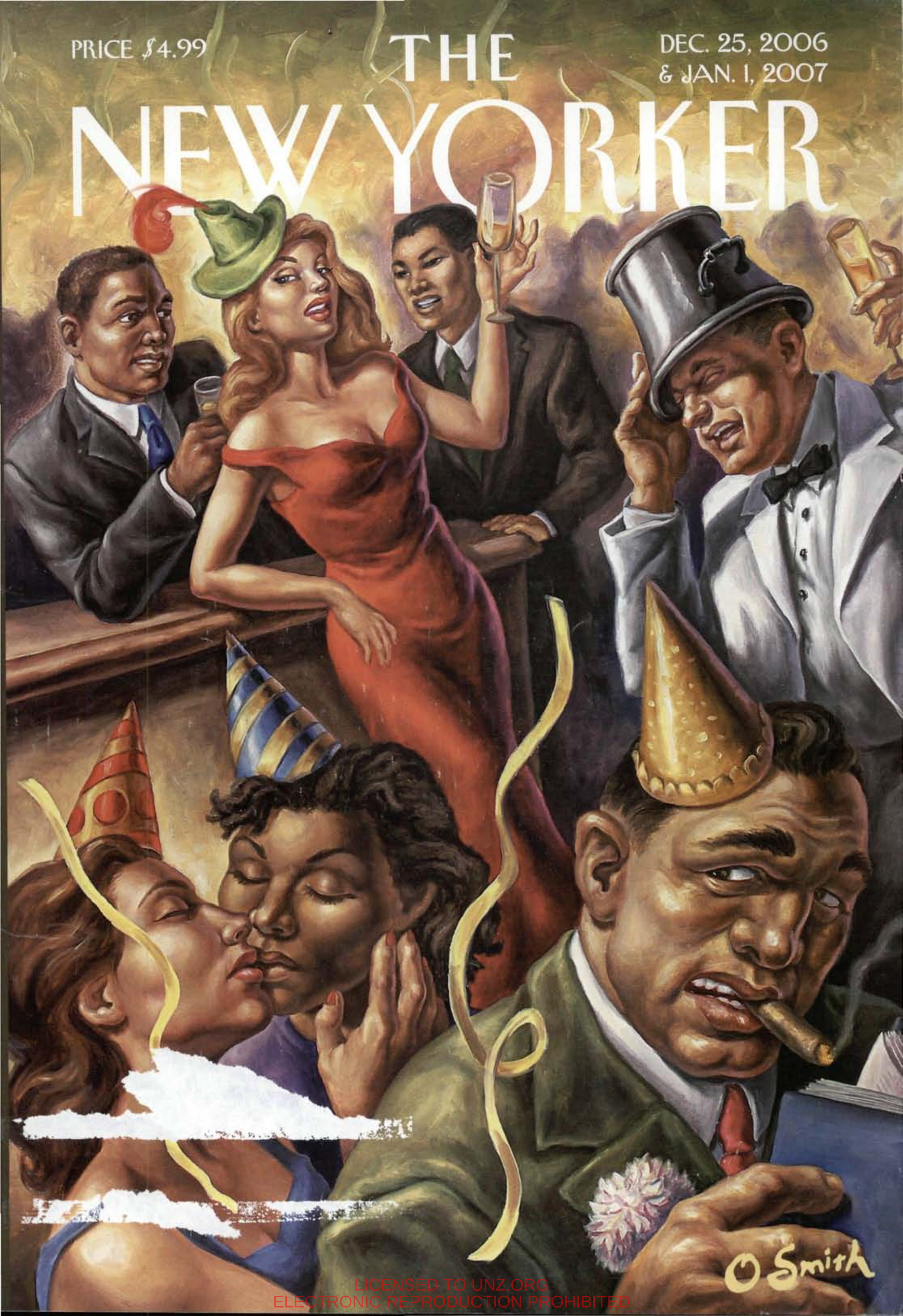

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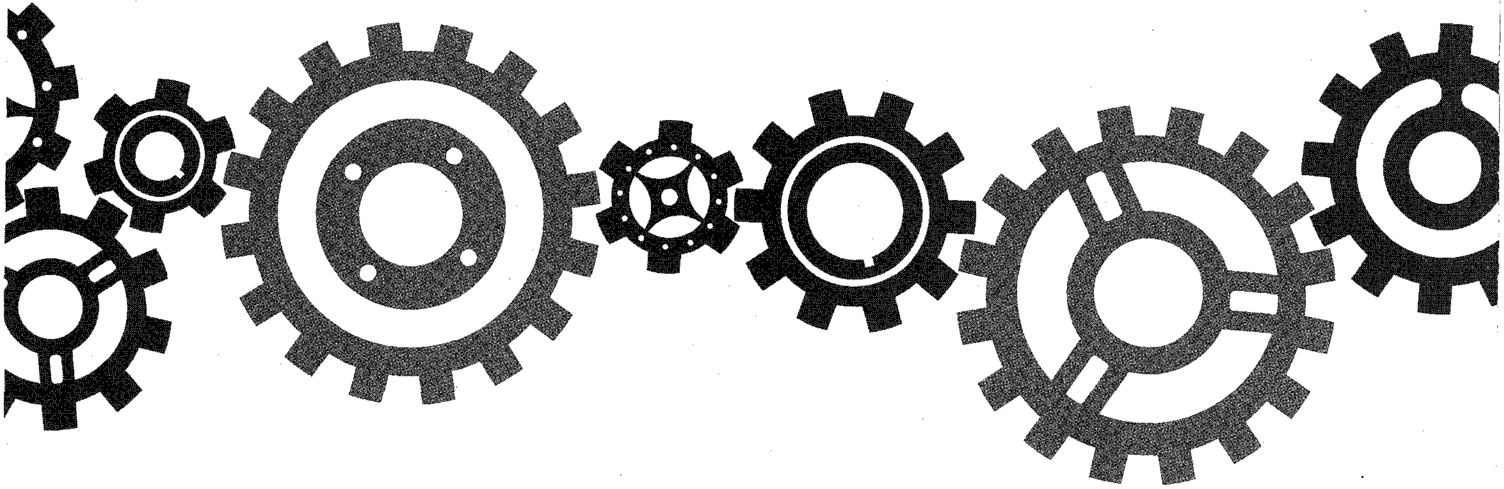

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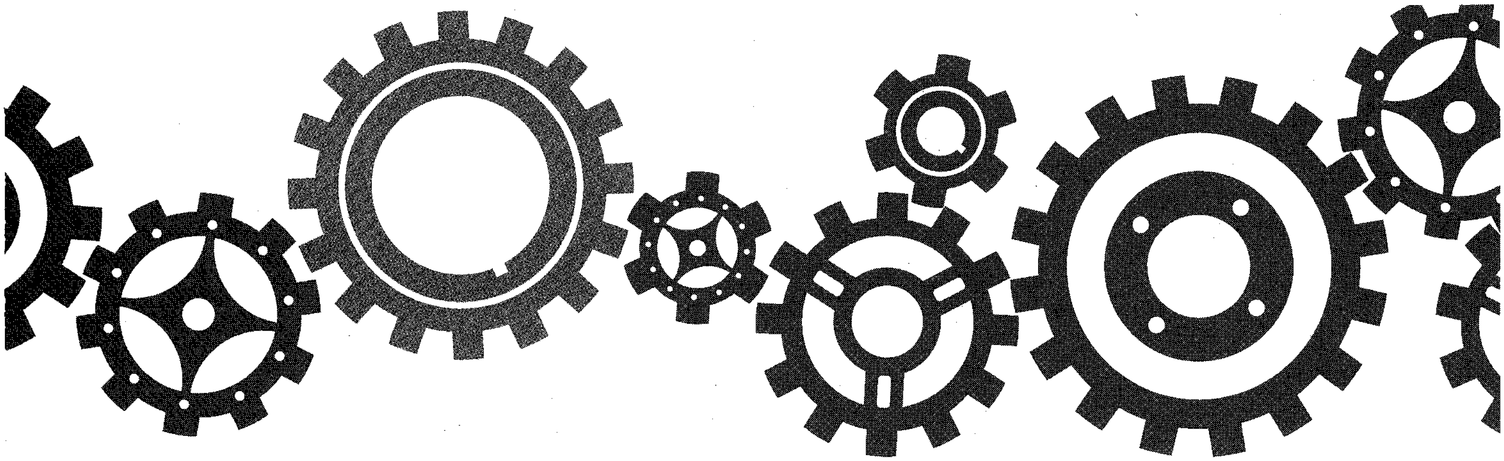

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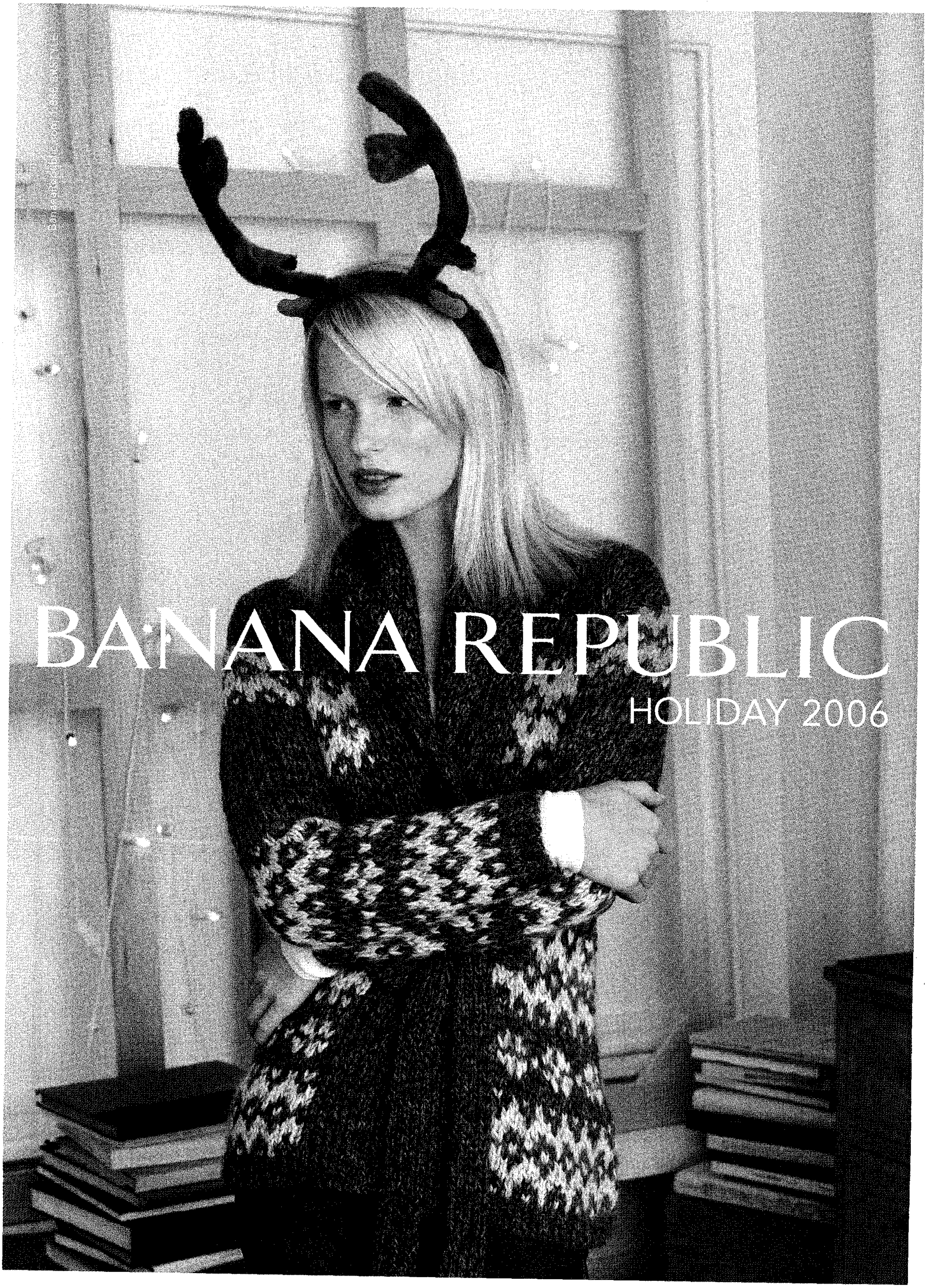
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CONTRIBUTORS

Orhan Pamuk ("My Father's Suitcase," p. 82) won this year's Nobel Prize in Literature. His novels include "The Black Book" and "My Name Is Red." "Other Colors," a collection of his essays, comes out next fall.

Louise Erdrich ("Demolition," p. 70) has published eleven novels, including "The Painted Drum."

Ian McEwan ("On Chesil Beach," p. 98) will publish a new novel, "On Chesil Beach," in June. His most recent novel is "Saturday."

Paul Theroux ("Monkey Hill," p. 108) is the author of "Blinding Light," now available in paperback. His other works include "The Great Railway Bazaar."

Tennessee Williams (Poem, p. 60), the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, died in 1983. He wrote "Blue Song" in 1937, when he was a student at Washington University in St. Louis.

Julian Barnes ("The Past Conditional," p. 56) is the author of, most recently, "Arthur & George." He lives in London.

Marguerite Duras ("The Bible," p. 66), a novelist, playwright, and filmmaker, died in Paris in 1996. A new translation of her novel "Yann Andréa Steiner" was published in July.

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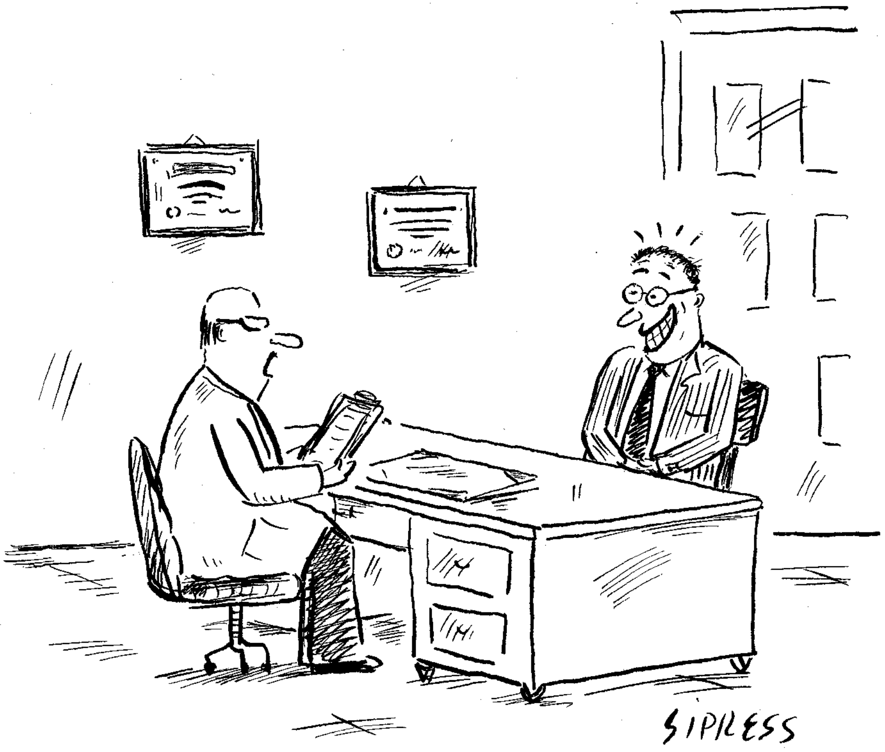
Dan Halpern (Books, p. 134) is a freelance writer.

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 45) won a Pulitzer Prize for "Ghost Wars," a book about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan.

Dahlia Ravikovitch (Poem, p. 127), who died last year in Tel Aviv, published ten volumes of poetry and three short-story collections in her native Hebrew. ♦



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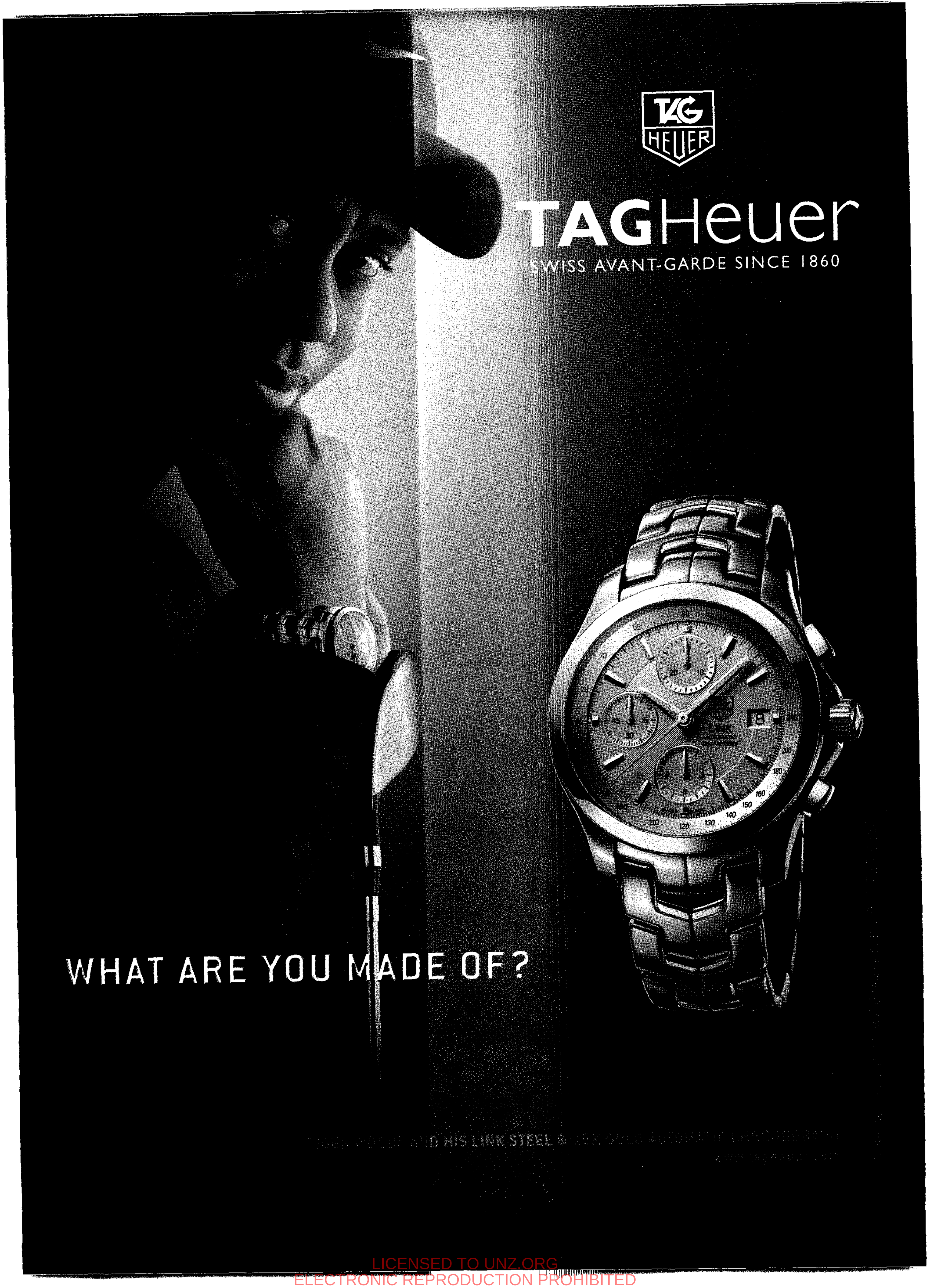
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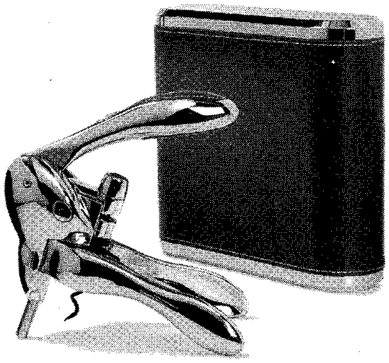

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SLAVE NARRATIVES

John Updike notes that Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" "never makes light of slavery and its attendant vast misery" (Books, November 6th). But he fails to account for the contradictory resonances that the work has taken on in the hundred and fifty-plus years since its publication. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was in fact more famous throughout the later nineteenth century as a drama than as a work of novelized fiction. Bowdlerized by anonymous authors, it became a racial melodrama, performed across the country in a form influenced by blackface conventions. The episode of Eliza crossing the iced-over Ohio River, which Updike notes for its "humor" and "physical comedy," became in performance a spectacle of racial persecution for the entertainment of the often exclusively white audience. (Live dogs were sometimes added in order to enhance the visceral sense of the hunt.) Stowe's moral agenda may perhaps be superior to Mark Twain's, but her trading in platitudes and stereotypes also allowed for exploitation.

Drew Lichtenberg
New Haven, Conn.

Updike's review led me to dig out an article in the December, 1971, issue of *American Heritage* which chronicles various social and political uses of Uncle Tom's story down through the years ("Uncle Tom: That Enduring Old Image"). One cartoon shows Tom as a "Negro voter" being whipped by Simon Legree-like Ben Tillman; another has Teddy Roosevelt, dressed as Eliza, fleeing across ice floes and carrying his successor, William Howard Taft, to rescue him from howling party reactionaries. The 1936 version of Eliza's flight has her as Europe, stepping from crisis to crisis. Because I am an African-American, my favorite, which appeared in 1959, depicts Eliza as the United States Constitution, and the "baby" she's clutching is integration; a snarling bloodhound—"Massive Resistance"—is at her heels, and court rulings are the ice floes that keep her from plunging into the icy water. This is one cartoon that's still timely.

Hosea L. Martin
Chicago, Ill.

Updike writes that in "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" Mark Twain "makes a terrible miscalculation when he reveals that Tom knew all along that Jim had already been freed by his mistress's will. It's as if Mark Twain forgot what slavery is." This may be true. But the opposite may also be true—that Twain knew exactly what slavery is. Indeed, Tom Sawyer may represent a kind of demon-child who was a product of nineteenth-century Southern white society, a demon-child who blithely treats a human being like a plaything. Tom ponders sawing off Jim's leg, forces him to write using his own blood, and coerces him into sleeping with rats, snakes, and spiders. He subjects Jim to a sickening kind of subservience that makes the reader cringe with disgust. If the reader laughs at this "prank," as Updike calls it, the joke is not on Jim. And perhaps that is the way Twain intended it all along.

Joseph Gazzola
New York City

FIGHTING THE COLD WAR

Nicholas Lemann, in his article on the journalist I. F. Stone, observes that "almost all of [his] serious political disputes involved his being more sympathetic to Communism than to whomever he was feuding with" ("The Weekly Warrior," November 27th). This assessment of Stone's politics misses the intensity of his simple, sometimes even misty-eyed, American patriotism. In the nineteen-sixties, as an editor of the magazine *Viet-Report,* I met frequently with Stone as both a friend and a colleague. We more than once talked of the difficulties inherent in fighting two opposing foes simultaneously. One cannot understand Stone or his politics without understanding his perception of the double and equal evil represented by the Soviet Union and the Cold War. As a citizen

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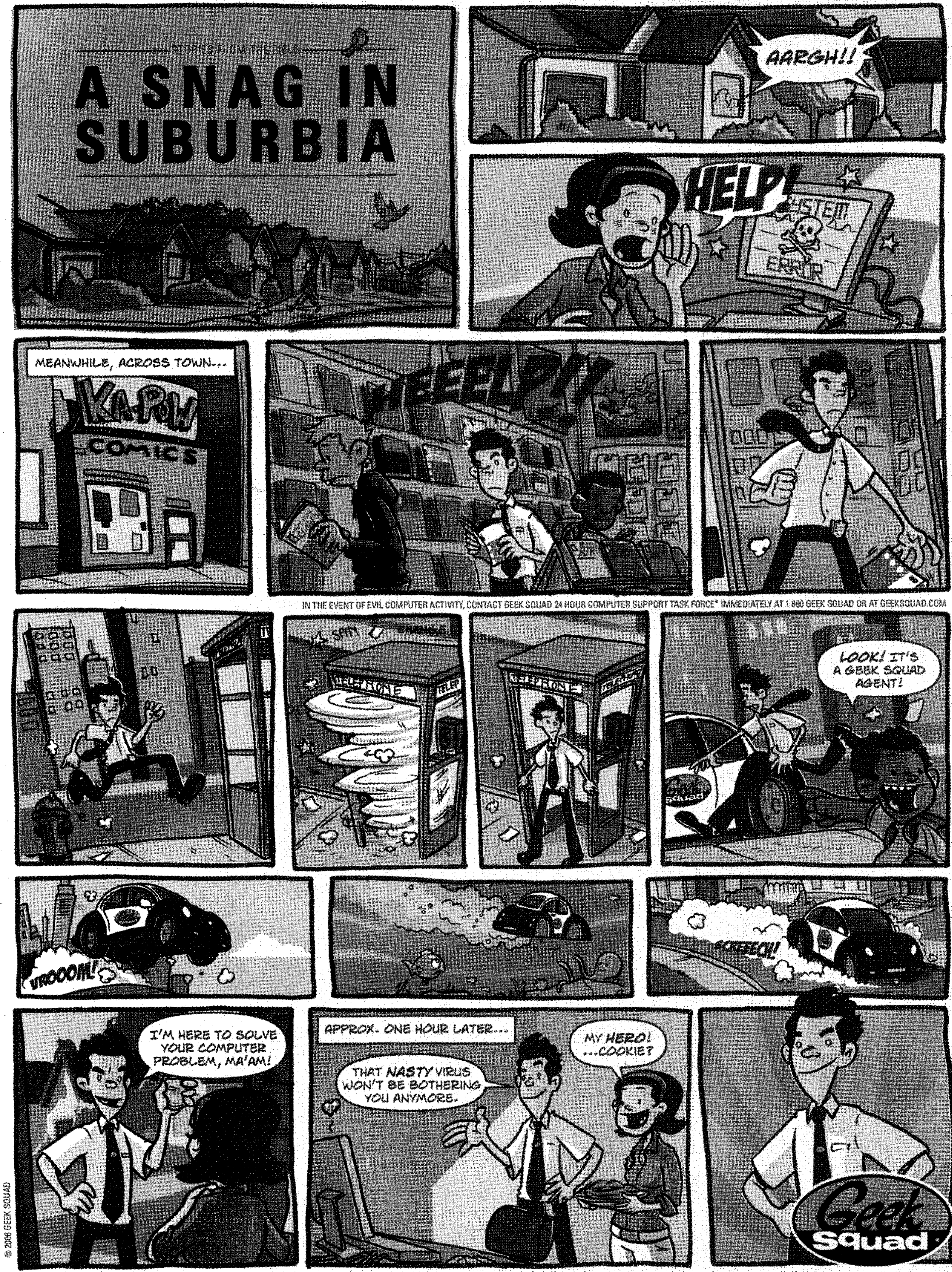
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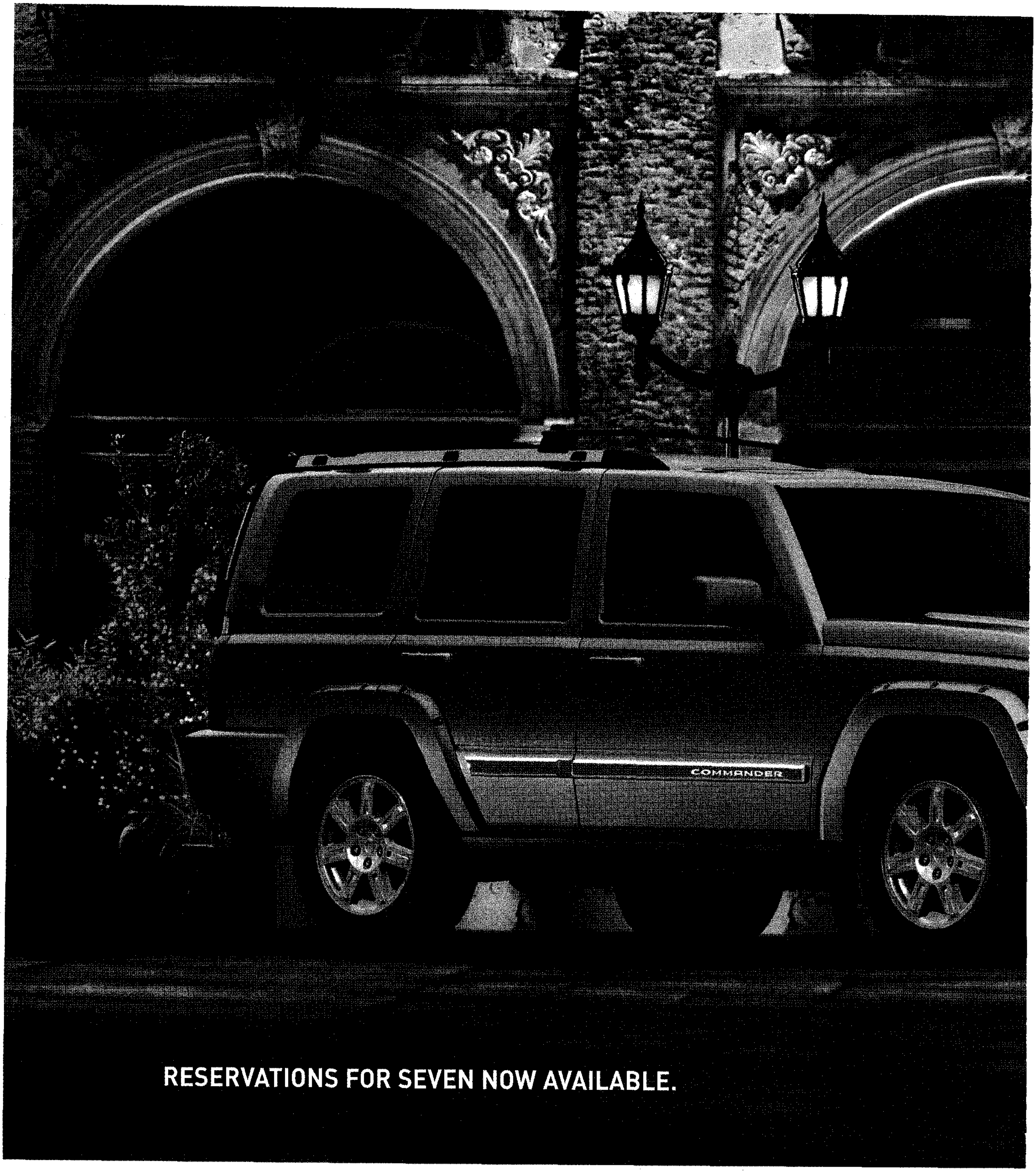
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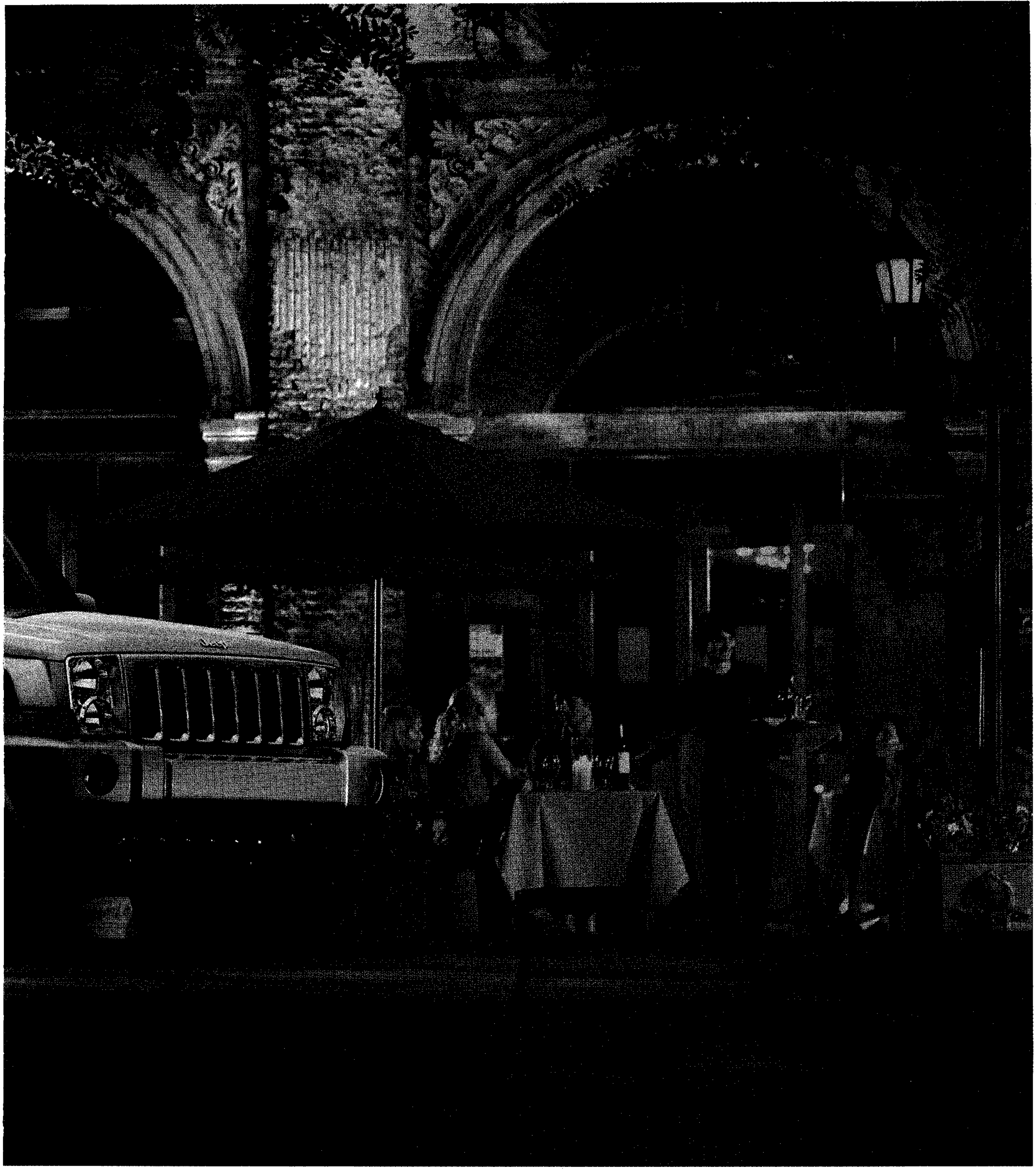

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and a journalist, he felt particularly compelled to tell truths in his own back yard about U.S. complicity in extending and maintaining a war that, outrunning its origins, created its own impetus. Had he lived in the Soviet Union, surely that same prickly pen would have been scribbling in the samizdat. More important, it is a disservice to Izzy, and even more to ourselves, to argue that not to be a "knocker" of the Soviet Union was therefore to be a "booster." It is essential to a present understanding of the world to recognize that the Cold War was willfully, dangerously, and destructively continued to a point that was ruinous to one party and, as we've yet to recognize, to the other side and the rest of the world as well.

John F. M. McDermott
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

STEIN AND ASSIMILATION

Janet Malcolm, in her exhaustive investigation of the circumstances of Gertrude Stein's and Alice B. Toklas's lapsed Jewishness, left one aspect of the story unexplored: the notion of assimilation ("Strangers in Paradise," November 13th). By the time of Stein's and Toklas's coming-of-age, assimilation had been hacking away at the cohesion of European Jewish communities, from both within and without, for more than a century. The unspoken promise of social emancipation in exchange for the abandonment of centuries-old customs was embraced by many Jews. No attentive reader could mistake the Hersland family, the central characters of Stein's novel "The Making of Americans," for anything but relatively recently emancipated, assimilated Jews. If Stein chose to leave the Herslands' Jewishness unmentioned throughout the nine hundred and twenty-five pages of her family saga—as she left her own Jewishness largely unspoken in her other works and in her private life as well—that, too, had more to do with the general rules of the game than with any individual idiosyncrasy: assimilation is never spoken about by the assimilated. One might say that the very expression of assimilation is that it must remain forever unexpressed.

André Balog
New York City

ROLL CREDITS

Adam Gopnik, in writing about the photographs of Jerry Shore, refers to my film "Eugene Atget," about the French photographer, as a Becker-Shore film (A Critic at Large, November 27th). As the credits clearly state, I am the sole director of the film; Jerry Shore was my assistant and is so credited. In our thirty-five-year relationship, which began when Jerry worked as my assistant on a series of short films, the only hyphenate was our friendship. I am overjoyed that Jerry is at last receiving some recognition for his remarkable photographs. God knows he could have used some of it in those tragic final years when there were so few of us in his camp.

Harold Becker
Los Angeles, Calif.

KEITH IN THE AIR

Nick Paumgarten describes Jimmy Carter on a commercial flight, walking about the cabin greeting the other passengers, and adds that it would be "hard, but fun, to imagine Keith Richards doing this" (The Talk of the Town, December 11th). That very thing happened during a late-night flight to Los Angeles in 1978. Richards, accompanied by Anita Pallenberg and a small entourage, was in first class. After we got under way and most of the other passengers were asleep, Keith and a friend emerged from behind the first-class curtain and toured the cheap seats, stopping to chat with those of us who were still awake. I was too starstruck (and exhausted) to bring myself to speak to him. I have met a few celebrities and not had such jitters; I attribute my reaction to the fact that, while Jimmy Carter may be an ex-President, Keith Richards, to my generation, is a god.

Wendy J. Porter
Danbury, Conn.

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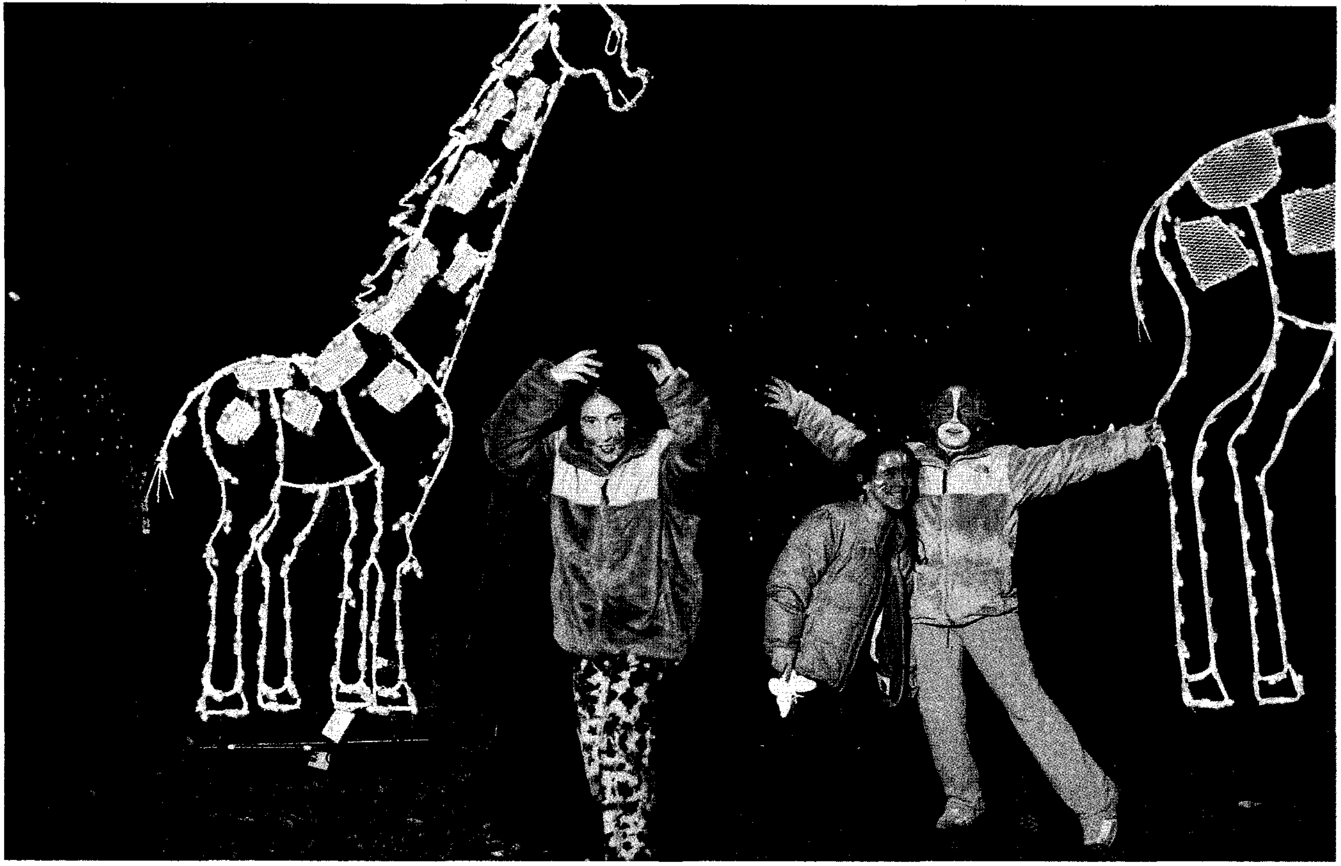

Animal-shaped holiday lights at the Bronx Zoo.
Photograph by Brian Finke.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LOONY TUNES

The Italian playwright and director Dario D'Ambrosi founded the Pathological Theatre after observing patients in an asylum in Milan. "A Crazy Sound," his latest piece to explore mental illness, is about a group of female inmates who make music using parts of their beds. (See page 18.)

NIGHT LIFE
ELEMENTARY ROCK

The jazz pianist, vocalist, and professional hipster Bob Dorough has kept company with Sugar Ray Robinson, Lenny Bruce, and Miles Davis (with whom he recorded the song "Blue Xmas," in 1962). He was also instrumental in creating the beloved "Schoolhouse Rock!" public-service television clips in the seventies and eighties. He puts his vast experience into a holiday show at Joe's Pub. (See page 24.)

ART
RISING WATER

The delicate touch and dense composition of Yun-Fei Ji's large-scale paintings, at the James Cohan gallery, evoke China's aesthetic history, while their subject matter—the displacement of more than a million Chinese citizens by the controversial Three Gorges Dam project—is decidedly contemporary. (See page 28.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RUSSIAN WINTER

Arium, a stylish new restaurant and performance space in the meatpacking district, offers a chance to hear two excellent young Russian pianists, Vassily Primakov and Konstantin Soukhovetski, play the heck out of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" on New Year's Eve. (See page 33.)

MOVIES
SILENT NIGHTS

Usher out the old year and ring in the new one at the Thalia with six short classics from 1915 to 1917 by Charlie Chaplin. The films include "The Tramp," which introduced Chaplin's most famous character; "The Immigrant," in which the Little Tramp finds no free lunch in the land of the free; and "Easy Street," in which policeman Charlie turns the town's worst roughnecks into upright churchgoers. (See page 40.)

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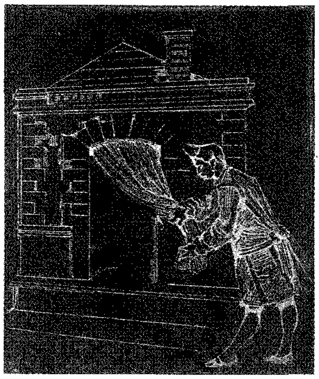
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
STUDIES IN AMBER

Perhaps the most enchanting room in New York now is at the Michael Werner gallery: "Polke–Bernstein–Amber," an update of the Renaissance-era *Wunderkammer* (cabinet of curiosities) by the quicksilvery German artist Sigmar Polke. It is about amber (*Bernstein*, in German), the fossilized tree resin that captivated European imaginations when it was discovered on Baltic shores. Brownish, liquidy paintings in artificial resin on translucent polyester fabric are spotlighted in a space that is painted a brooding eggplant purple; display cases present authentic Renaissance and Baroque amber artifacts, such as candlesticks and figurines. The paintings glow uncannily, because the rectangles of wall behind them are white. Bounced light casts shadows and exposes intricate textures and lurking imagery, in 3-D chiaroscuro. The installation boosts an idea that might seem merely precious to a pitch of vertigo. Jadedness doesn't stand a chance at this show. You may feel like a child again, thrilled and a little bit scared by serious splendor.



SIGMAR POLKE, "UNTITLED" (2001-2006)

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE COAST OF UTOPIA,
PART TWO: SHIPWRECK
The second chapter of Tom Stoppard's trilogy about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals. In previews. Opens Dec. 21. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

A CRAZY SOUND
Dario D'Ambrosi, founder of the Pathological Theatre, directs his play about six female psychiatric patients who make music from found objects. Dec. 21-30. (La Mama E.T.C., 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

(DON'T GO) HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS
The Calamity Carolers of Doom perform a parodic seasonal revue, with musical numbers including "Angels We Have Seen While High." Dec. 21-31. (June Havoc, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE SCENE
Tony Shalhoub and Patricia Heaton star in Theresa Rebeck's satire about self-absorbed Manhattan partygoers. Directed by Rebecca Taichman. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS
The New Globe Theatre presents Carlo Goldoni's 1745 comedy, in a new adaptation by Anne and Stuart Vaughan. Previews begin Dec. 22. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

ANNIE
Kathie Lee Gifford plays Miss Hannigan in a revival of the 1977 musical. Also starring Conrad John Schuck, as Daddy Warbucks, and Marissa O'Donnell, as Annie. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. Through Dec. 30.)

THE APPLE TREE
Kristin Chenoweth stars in this musical from 1966, based on three stories of temptation. Gary Griffin directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE BIG VOICE: GOD OR MERMAN?
Jim Brochu and Steve Schalchlin wrote and perform this show, about the transmogrifying effect that musical theatre has had on their lives. (The Actor's Temple, 339 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

CARRIE
Stephen King's "Carrie" has been staged before, as a Broadway-musical flop (it lasted three days). Theatre Couture's version is new and has no music, though calling it a straight play would be simply wrong. As played by the drag diva Sherry Vine (a.k.a. Keith Levy), Carrie gives the impression of a meek underdog, but beneath her raging inferiority complex is a teen-age outsider with a gift for telekinesis. The production sticks to the nineteen-seventies horror schlock of the film and provides a perfect springboard for Couture's over-the-top performers. The director, Josh Rosenzweig, avoids drag clichés thanks to the creations of the puppeteer Basil Twist, which include a demonically possessed Tupperware display, a blazing inferno made of red silk, and a languid pink pig whose death scene is irresistible. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 30.)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Sandra Nordgren adapted Dickens's classic tale for this 13th Street Repertory Company production, directed by Esther Neff. (50 W. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA,
PART ONE: VOYAGE
The first of three plays by Tom Stoppard about a group of Russian intellectuals. The ensemble cast includes Ethan Hawke, Brían F. O'Byrne, Jennifer Ehle, and Billy Crudup. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

GREY GARDENS
Christine Ebersole still astounds in her dual role in the Broadway transfer of the musical based on the Maysles brothers' classic 1975 documentary about two individualistic hermits, Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, who also happened to be the aunt and cousin of the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Changes to songs in both acts have minimal over-all effect—the first half is still a bit of a fusty bore, and the second half still suffers from odd, uninspired ghost sequences. But Erin Davie, as Young Little Edie, livens up the role with spunk and a proper accent, and Ebersole's uncanny incarnation of Little Edie in the second half, along with the new, tragic ending, resonates well after the curtain goes down. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

LEBENSRAUM
Israel Horovitz's comic drama imagines a German chancellor inviting six million Jews to relocate to Germany. T. Ryder Smith stars. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 30.)

MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS
A musical adaptation of Sally Benson's short stories depicts a family eagerly awaiting the 1904 World's Fair. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

MURDER MYSTERY BLUES
Years ago, Woody Allen wrote a pair of brief film-noir parodies about an egghead gumshoe named Kaiser Lupowitz, which the director Janey Clarke has adapted, along with some of his other short pieces, into a fizzy brew of music and dialogue. Live jazz interludes (composed by Warren Wills) alternate with fulsomely absurd sketches about the life of a hardboiled nineteen-forties private eye (Alex Haven) with an interest in ontology. When Lupowitz isn't discussing Kant, his attentions are claimed by tantalizing femmes fatales, weary-eyed blondes, and a bordello where men go to talk about Noam Chomsky. The talented ensemble provides the live music and delivers the comedic material in broad gangster style, making for an effervescent evening. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 31.)

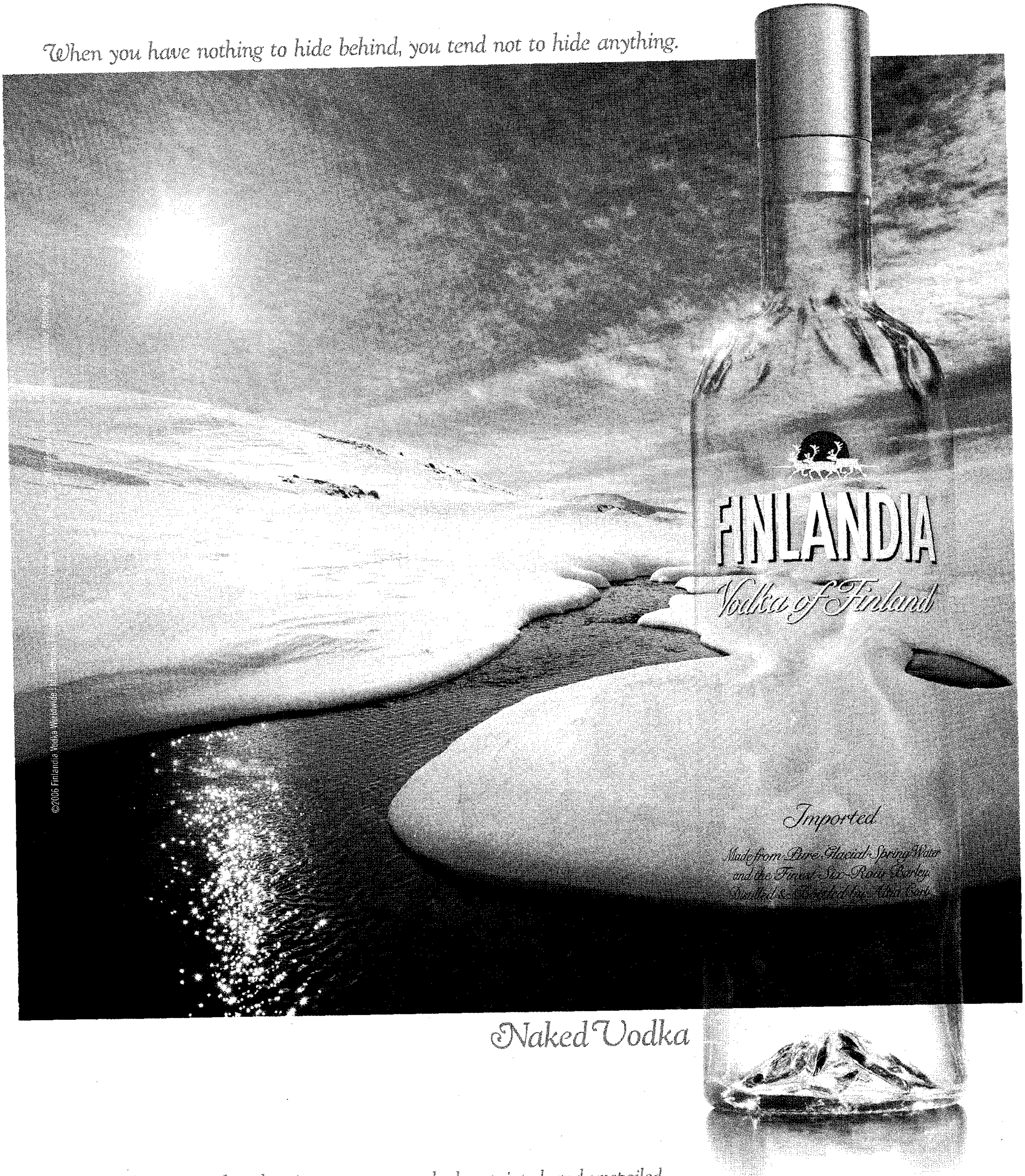
ROOM SERVICE
This suave and cunning revival of John Murray and Allen Boretz's 1937 show-biz farce, about an unscrupulous would-be producer (David Edwards), returns with the Peccadillo Theatre Company's original cast of twelve. Under the able direction of Dan Wackerman, the thirties gags receive the proper period accents, making for some colorful and outrageous antics. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

SPRING AWAKENING
In Michael Mayer's exciting musical reimagining of Frank Wedekind's 1891 play, now on Broadway after a run at the Atlantic Theatre Company, fresh-faced teen-agers in a late-nineteenth-century provincial German town dream of the salvation of the flesh. The awakening, it turns out, is not just to sexuality but also to musical storytelling. The lyricist Steven Sater conveys, in the youths' syntactical fumblings, the inadequacy of speech to cope with the vortex of feeling, and the rigor of Mayer's direction communicates a powerful and poetic intelligence. With music by Duncan Sheik and choreography by Bill T. Jones. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE TAKING OF MISS JANIE
New Federal Theatre revives Ed Bullins's drama, which débuted in 1974, about a white college student who is raped by a black classmate in the midst of the social upheaval of the nineteen-sixties. (Abrons Arts Center, at Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 23.)

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE . . .
The Flea Theatre and the Chelsea Art Museum present a series of ten-minute plays inspired by the children's poem, written by Christopher

When you have nothing to hide behind, you tend not to hide anything.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Durang, Len Jenkin, Elizabeth Swados, Roger Rosenblatt, and Mac Wellman. (41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 30.)

TWO TRAINS RUNNING
In the Pittsburgh diner where August Wilson set this thrilling play, the sixth entry in his masterly ten-play cycle covering the African-American experience in the twentieth century, everyone does the math—Memphis (Frankie Faison), the owner of the diner, calculates the price he'll accept from the city, which wants to take over his building for urban renewal; Wolf (Ron Cephas Jones) is a numbers runner; and the jailbird Sterling (Chad L. Coleman) tries to sell his watch to get a stake—but nothing adds up. The Signature Theatre Company's revival, under the direction of Lou Bellamy, can't duplicate the subtleties of the 1992 Broadway production. Nonetheless, from the first beat the actors project us into the extraordinary folk world of Wilson's imagining. They hear his music, even if they can't always produce the full heartbreaking power of his poetic sound. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/18/06.) (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT
The return of Les Freres Corbusier's hit, in which a cast of grade-school children bring Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, and his teachings to life in a mock Christmas pageant. (Reviewed in this issue.) (4th Street Theatre, 83 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE
For this 1905 play, set in the mahogany library of the Voysey family's luxurious country house, Harley Granville-Barker turned the notion of property-as-theft into what the Edwardians would have called a ripping yarn. As it turns out, every charmed detail in the affluent Voysey tableau is built on fraud—a scam perpetuated over two generations by successive heads of the family's distinguished law firm—until Edward Voysey (Michael Stuhlbarg), the dour, dutiful son of the current scion, uncovers accounting irregularities in his father's books and confronts him. This muscular adaptation by David Mamet, directed by David Warren and presented by the Atlantic Theatre Company, substitutes combative urgency for social satire; Mamet raises the stakes both of the emotion and of the brutality. (12/18/06) (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

THE AMERICAN PILOT: City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Dec. 31. **ARMS AND THE MAN:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through Dec. 23. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GUTENBERG! THE MUSICAL!:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 31. **KAOS:** New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 31. **THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **AN OAK TREE:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **REGRETS ONLY:** City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **THE VERTICAL HOUR:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 31.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Dec. 23: The music whipped up by the Brooklynite **Dr. Israel** (his real name is Douglas Bennett) is mystifying and, ultimately, rewarding. The good doctor switches from break beats to power-guitar chords, sometimes on the same track, with a wicked wizardry. Dec. 30: **Charanga Soleil,** a large dance band playing a mix of Haitian *compas*, Cuban salsa, and Congolese soukous, takes its name from Radio Soleil, a Brooklyn-based station serving the Haitian community.

James Brown plays B. B. King's on New Year's Eve.

RACHEL DOMM

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 27: Matching the insouciance of the Velvet Underground with the svelte aloofness of vintage David Bowie, the **Psychedelic Furs** were among the original torchbearers of New Wave music. Their hipster cachet gradually eroded as the decade wore on (and they became more well known through the use of their song "Pretty in Pink" in the 1986 John Hughes film of the same name), but their early work has a timeless resonance. Dec. 30: **James Hunter,** a blue-eyed-soul singer with a chiselled chin. Later that night, the **Rebirth Brass Band,** from New Orleans, leads the charge into the biggest party night of the year. Dec. 31: **James Brown,** the Godfather of Soul, gets up off of that thing with a pair of shows.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 20: **Kiki & Herb** (otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman) ring in the holidays. Dec. 22-23: In the nineties, the local alt-rockers the **Bogmen** became known for a skewed sensibility and a distinctive rock-jazz-reggae fusion. They broke up in 2001, but they've since been together off and on. These shows, and the one at Webster Hall, below, benefit Kristy's Smile, a charity fund set up in the name of the keyboardist's wife, Kristy Irvine Ryan, an equities trader who died in the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center. Dec. 29-31: **Patti Smith,** the unofficial poet laureate of punk rock.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—After being a finalist on the third season of "American Idol," the singer and actress **Jennifer Hudson** went on to land the role of Effie in the new film "Dreamgirls," which is based on the eighties Broadway musical inspired by the story of the Supremes. On Dec. 30, Hudson, who sang gospel as a child and recently signed a record deal with Clive Davis's J Records, makes her New York solo début in a multimedia extravaganza dubbed "One Night Only: Dreamgirls (The Underground Clubmix)." A dance party with the d.j. **Junior Vasquez** follows the show. (For tickets, call 800-494-8497, and for more information visit www.saintatlarge.com.) Dec. 31: The indie-rock sensation **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah!**

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 21: Delivering a surreal take on frantic Ukrainian Gypsy music with untethered abandon, **Gogol Bordello** is an unlikely success story in antiseptic post-millennial New York City. The credit goes to Eugene Hurtz, the band's front man, who's like an unholy combination of Sid Vicious and Bertolt Brecht. Dec. 29 and Dec. 31: The local favorites the **Brazilian Girls** and their global electro-pop. Dec. 30: The upstate jam band **moe.** warms up for its big gig the following night at Radio City Music Hall.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 22: The sweet sounds of **Las Rubias del Norte.** Dec. 29-31: In her recent Off Broadway one-woman show "Everything Bad & Beautiful," **Sandra Bernhard** rocked out and riffed on everyone from Britney to Condi. (She imagined the latter in a face-off with Rosa Parks.) Expect original songs, covers, and raucous standup, along with biting commentary on both political and celebrity culture.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Dec. 23: "Jewmongous!" This comedic variety show, which takes its inspiration from the Old Testament, was created by **Sean Altman,** who is known for his work with the revue "What I Like About Jew," for founding the group Rockapella, and for writing the theme song for the children's television show "Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?" The guests include the comedians **Todd Barry, Cindy Kaplan,** and **Steve Goodie.**

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Dec. 31: The jam band **moe.,** which has its fans aflutter with news of a new studio album, "The Conch," due out next month.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 21: The **Bogmen** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Dec. 26-27: The Beatles cover band the **Fab Faux.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Jan. 13: The vocalist **Andrea Marcovicci** invokes the spirit of Hildegarde, the larger-than-life, if now little remembered, queen of mid-century American night life.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 20-23: **Freddy Cole,** one of the finest jazz singers of his generation,

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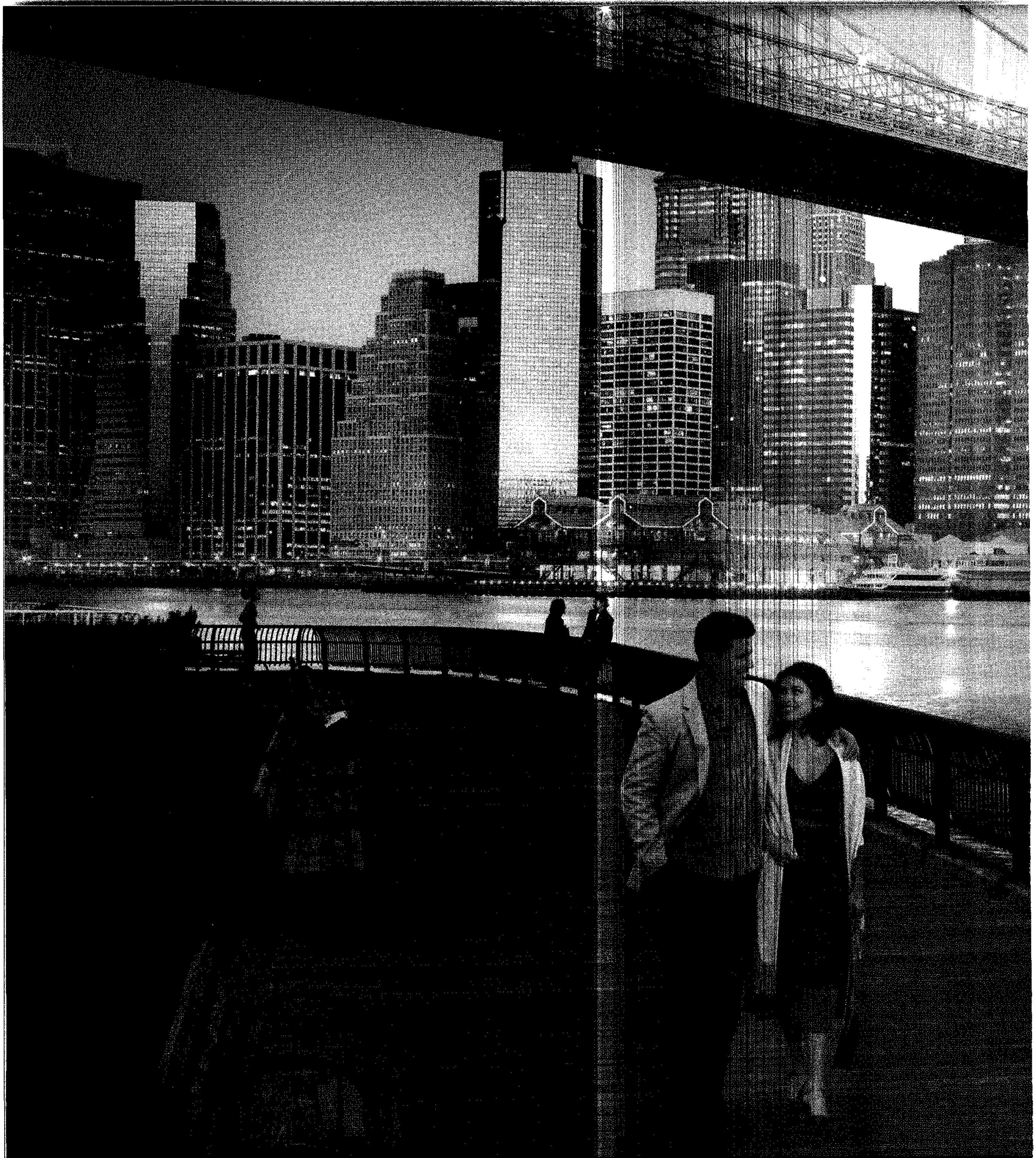

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has a secure place in the vocal pantheon. Dec. 27-30: **George Coleman's** tenor saxophone speaks an authentic, harmonically complex dialect that fuses Southern grit with bebop. Dec. 31: **Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Big Band** rings in the New Year, with assistance from the vocalist **Hilary Cole.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 19-24 and Dec. 26-31: **Chris Botti,** who looks like Sting and sounds like a diluted Miles Davis, plays middlebrow jazz at its least taxing.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 19-24: The funky organist **Dr. Lonnie Smith** brings in a funky saxophonist, **David (Fathead) Newman,** to rough up some bop, ballads, and blues.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 21-24: The vocalist **Kevin Mahogany** joins the pianist **Cyrus Chestnut** for a Christmas show. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The Charles Mingus legacy bands—the sizable Mingus Big Band and Mingus Orchestra, along with the smaller Mingus Dynasty—are in rotation on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—For the highly touted pianist **Robert Glasper,** post-bop jazz and contemporary R. & B. lie close to each other on the musical continuum. On Dec. 19-21, he's here with a more traditionally minded trio, and, on the last night, a guest saxophonist, **Mark Turner.** Dec. 22-23 features his funk-fortified band, the **Robert Glasper Experiment.** Dec. 27-31: The **Preservation Hall Jazz Band,** from New Orleans.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 23: If you're of a certain age, you know **Bob Dorough** from his bebopping vocal work with the likes of Miles Davis; if you're a little younger, you know him from his pedagogically minded TV spots for "Schoolhouse Rock!" He brings together both musical worlds—and a few more to boot—in this holiday show.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Dec. 21: High spirits are part of every **Sex Mob** gig. The band's "Holiday Spectacular" show, featuring the freewheeling trombonist **Roswell Rudd,** holds terrific possibilities for merriment. Dec. 31: A multitalented triumvirate—the saxophonist and recently announced MacArthur "genius" **John Zorn** (who also runs the label Tzadik), the bassist and producer **Bill Laswell** (Axiom), and the vocalist and former Faith No More front man **Mike Patton** (Ipecac)—ring in the New Year. With Steven Bernstein's **Millennial Territory Orchestra,** which will be joined by the vocalist **Jennifer Charles.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 19-24: The **Cedar Walton** quartet, featuring **Vincent Herring.** Decorous bop piano meets impassioned bop saxophone when the temperamentally dissimilar yet sympathetically matched keyboardist Walton and the reeds player Herring come together. Walton, a respected veteran noted for his work with Art Blakey in the mid-sixties, brings a world of experience and his superior compositions to the table. Herring has fervor and increasing maturity as a modernist improviser on his side. Dec. 26-31: **Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band of New Orleans.** The clarinettist and musicologist White celebrates the riches of jazz's first golden era. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Nan Kempner: American Chic."** Through March 4. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ From the eighteen-eighties through the nineteen-thirties, missionaries and ethnographers photographed and collected artifacts from various religious cults on the island of New Guinea, which is only slightly larger than Massachusetts and Connecticut combined but is home to about a thousand distinct language groups. Five geocultural areas are represented in photographs and accompanying objects in **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf,"** the majority of which are "spirit boards," or flat, masklike totems made of pigmented wood. There are also shaped masks and a remarkable dancing figure carved from the gnarled root of a mangrove tree. Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Ron Mueck."** Through Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Design Life Now: National Design Triennial 2006."** Through July 29. ♦ **"Made to Scale: Staircase Masterpieces."** A collection of staircase models, mostly from nineteenth-century France. Through June 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

TABLES FOR TWO
THE RUSSIAN TEA ROOM

150 W. 57th St. (212-581-7100)—As anyone with a passing knowledge of New York City real-estate lore or the oeuvre of Dustin Hoffman knows, the Russian Tea Room ought to feel like someplace special. Never has this seemed more the case than this year, when Gerald Lieblich rescued the deed from the United States Golf Association and pledged to restore the restaurant to its "Tootsie"-era primacy. His incarnation, the Tea Room's fourth since 1926, opened in November, and it leaves intact, more or less, Warner LeRoy's thirty-six-million-dollar tsarist wonderland from 1999. A liveried attendant continues to whirl the revolving door; the burnished antique samovars stay, as do veal Pojarski and chicken Kiev (albeit in fine print on the menu's last page). The only thing Lieblich forgot to take out of the attic, it appears, is a sense of grand occasion.

Everybody's rooting for the place. "Is that a Picasso?" a tourist asked the other evening, eager to imbue with further meaning a painting, hanging near the elevator, of a horse rider playing a mandolin. A few days later, at lunch, the *Post* columnist Cindy Adams—a faithful during the regime of longtime owner Faith Stewart-Gordon—was back giving the old hangout a fresh shot. The problem is not the food, which runs from serviceable (molasses-glazed seared breast of duck, venison dusted with cocoa) to forgettably enjoyable (short-rib borscht, the famous beef Stroganoff). *Zakuski*—a selection of Russian appetizers—sounded fun, and might have been, had the waiter bothered to explain, after delivering a lovely étagère, what it held. Likewise: a bowl of soup took thirty-five minutes to arrive; a waiter knocked a wine list off a table and didn't pick it up. It's not surliness, exactly, but apathy that's killing the room. As a Texan visitor put it recently, "The service here doesn't know diddly-squat." Cindy Adams concurred, writing in her column that the management had failed to recognize who she was. Unless the mood rises to the setting, the Russian Tea Room may not get another chance. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $32-$48.)

—Lauren Collins

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"New Photography 2006"** features the work of Jonathan Monk, Barbara Probst, and Jules Spinatsch. Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"Manet and the Execution of Maximilian."** Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Eye on Europe: Prints, Books, and Multiples, 1960 to Now."** Through Jan. 1. ♦ **"OMA in Beijing: China Central Television Headquarters by Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren."** Through Feb. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

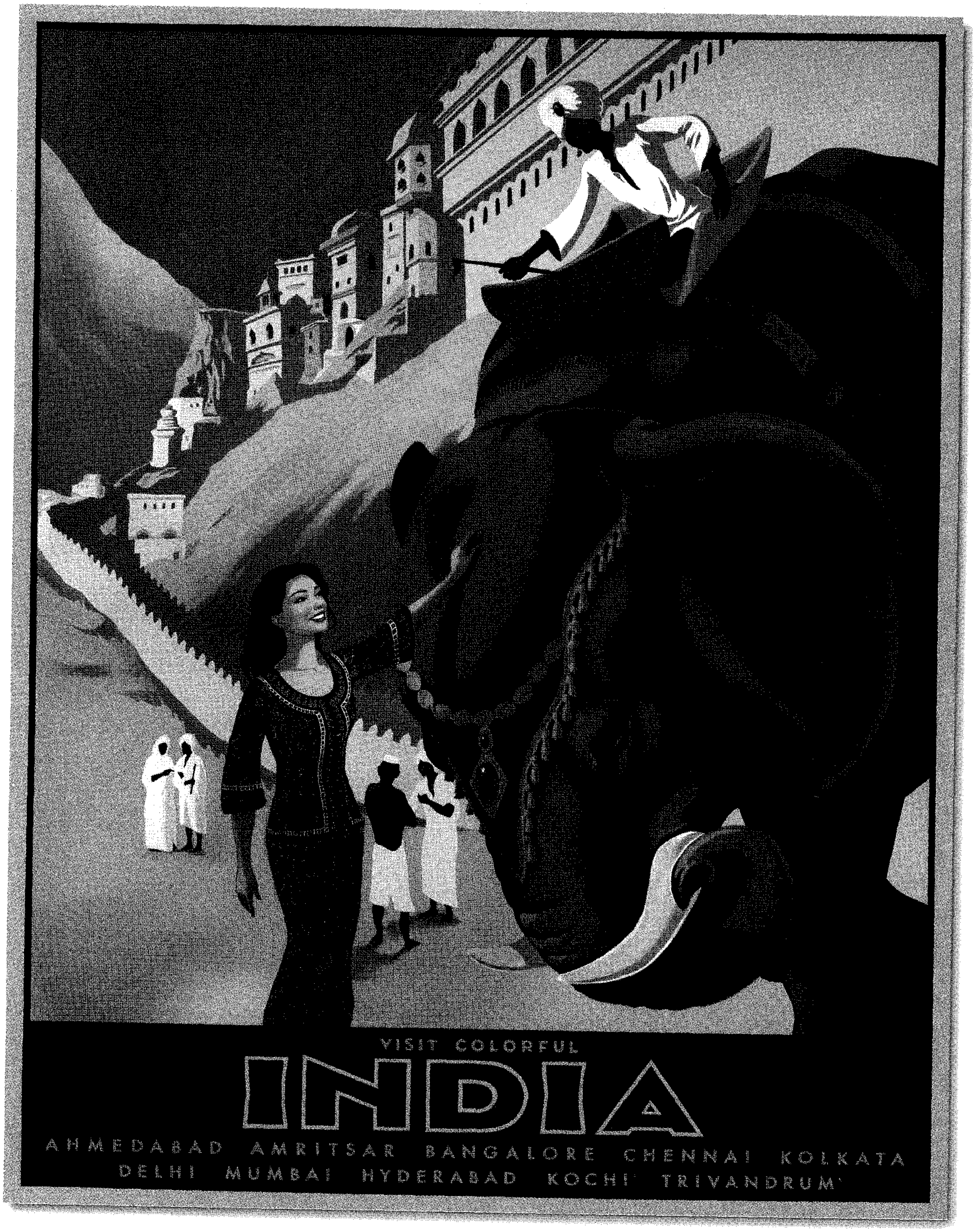
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005."** Through Feb. 11. ♦ All roads in modernism lead back to Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy in **"Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ Works by Edward Hopper fill the fifth floor, including "Nighthawks," on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **Mark Grotjahn.** Through Jan. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804): A New Testament."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alex Katz Paints Ada."** Through March 18. ♦ **"Masters of American Comics"** and **"Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics."** Through Jan. 28. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations."** Steinberg is famed for his rendering of a New Yorker's Weltanschauung (the original 1976 illustration was titled "View of the World from 9th Avenue"), but he explored the proclivities of folks from many geographies and subcultures in ink drawings and collages such as "Florida Types," "Racetrack Crowd," and "Important People." A characteristically idiosyncratic map of Wyoming notes that Switzerland, Holland, Albania, New Jersey, and Sicily and several other islands could fit within its ninety-seven thousand square miles. In other words, although Steinberg, a native of Romania, arrived in New York in 1942 and became a die-hard Knickerbocker, he never lost sight of the rest of the world. Through March 4. ♦ **"Frago-**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"Untitled (Central Park Wind)," from 2004, is in Gail Albert Halaban's "This Stage of Motherhood," at Mann through Jan. 6.

nard and the French Tradition." Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Bob Dylan's American Journey: 1956-1966."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"A City on Paper: Saul Steinberg's New York."** Through March 25. ♦ **"Black Style Now."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Willing to Be Lucky: Ambitious New Yorkers in the Pages of *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Josef Hoffmann: Interiors, 1902-1913."** Through Feb. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery."** The museum's first foray into contemporary art explores an ignoble history. The artists represented include Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, and Fred Wilson. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Elegy in the Dust: September 11 and the Chelsea Jeans Memorial."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Stan Douglas: Inconsolable Memories."** Through March 18. ♦ **"Africa Comics"** gathers original drawings for a very wide range of strikingly adept cartoon fiction from twenty countries, most in French or English. Themes of social injustice and civic betterment predominate, indicating cultures in which romance, comedy, and fantasies of individual heroism have scant purchase. A sense of angry and aspiring collective dynamism suffuses the show. Through March 18. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

HARRY CALLAHAN
There are only eleven photographs in this smart, spare show, and none are much larger than an index card, but Callahan's marvellously precise vision couldn't be better served. The theme, "Nature," is broad enough to include a gossamer image of his wife's nude torso superimposed on a grassy field, as well as leafy branches silhouetted against the sky, calligraphic studies of reeds and weeds, and a sand dune at Cape Cod that dips just enough to permit an enticing glimpse of the sea. In one of several wall texts, Callahan says that he's most interested in revealing and intensifying his subject. He does that here by melding specificity and abstraction until the distinction dissolves. Through Jan. 6. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Short List

WILSON A. BENTLEY: Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 212-838-0333. Through Dec. 22. **STÉPHANE COUTURIER:** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Jan. 6. **JOHN CURRIN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 22. **GREGORY CREWDSON:** Skarstedt, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-737-2060. Through Dec. 20. **CHARLES JONES:** Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Jan. 6. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Jan. 20. **ROBERT POLIDORI:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Dec. 23. **SIGMAR POLKE:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Jan. 13. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **FRED SANDBACK:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Jan. 20. **SAUL STEINBERG:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through Feb. 10. **KATSUMI WATANABE:** Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067. Through Dec. 22. **"HEROINES":** Arnold and Marie Schwartz Gallery, Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through May, 2007. **"TURKESTAN: ORIENTALISM IN SOVIET AVANT-GARDE PHOTOGRAPHY":** Nailya Alexander, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211. Through Dec. 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ATELIER VAN LIESHOUT / SABINE HORNIG
The Rotterdam-based art-and-design collective's imagined "SlaveCity" is a perfectly productive capitalist kibbutz, where drone "participants" work fourteen-hour days (half at tech jobs, half at organic farming) to earn billions of dollars in the service of their self-sufficient prison. Gallerygoers are addressed like prospective clients, with architectural models of dormitories, refectories, and workrooms, along with a walk-in "Midi-Disciplinator" module, where they can play at being jailed. As satire, it's heavy-handed, but the objects strike a perverse balance between craftsy and corporate. In the upstairs gallery, Hornig proposes her own dystopic vision with glossy C-prints of pull-down storefront gates and garbage dumps. Through Jan. 6. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

JOHN DIVOLA
The L.A.-based photographer shows elements of three series he made there in the nineteen-seventies, all of which involve abandoned homes and vandalism. One series, in black-and-white, records the evidence of breaks-ins at condemned houses in the deadpan style of a crime-scene investigator. The other work, some of it in color, is more unsettling and transgressive: the ritualistic patterns of spray paint in these trashed interiors were added by Divola himself, who used the spaces as ad-hoc studios and decorated their destruction. The photographer has talked of appropriating "the antisocial act as an aesthetic gesture," but when he performs both act and ges-

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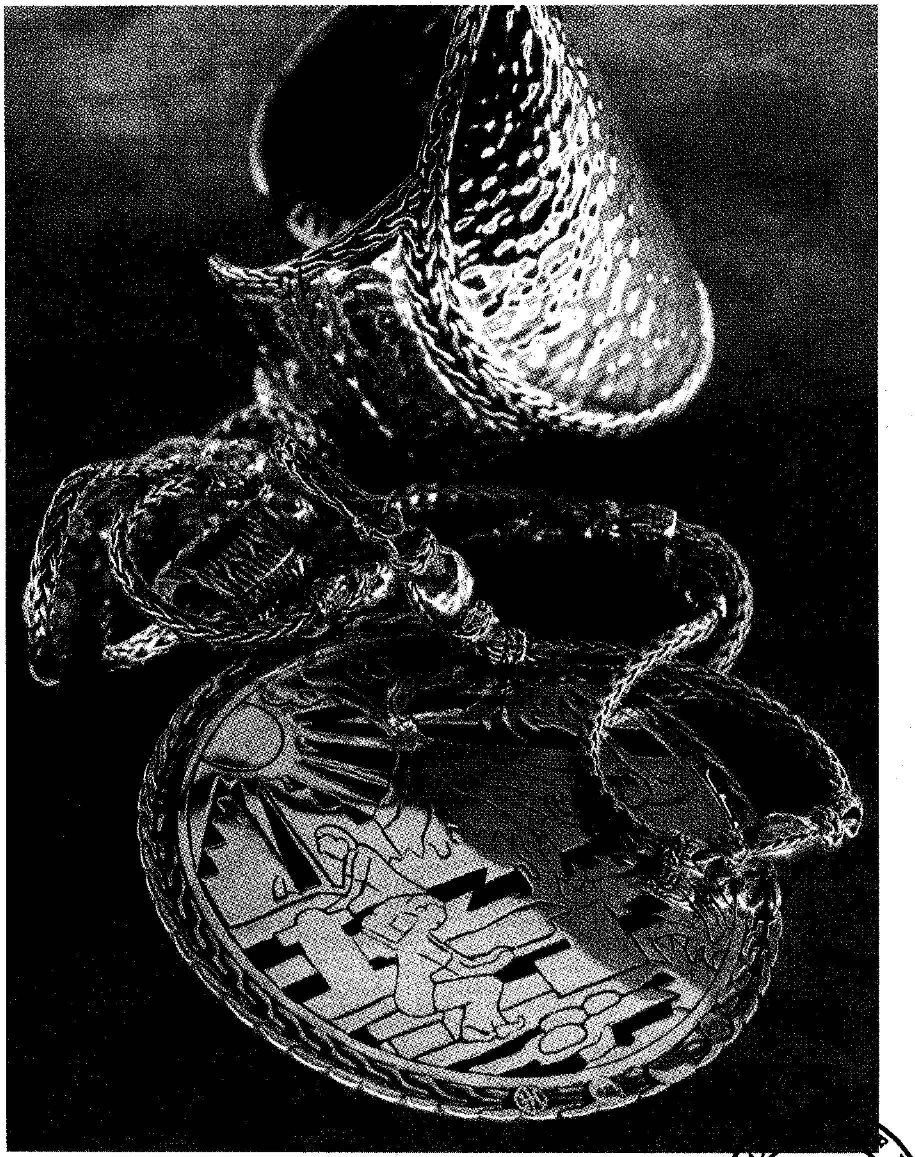

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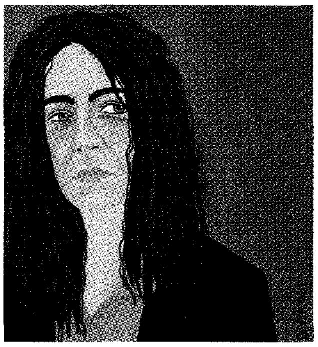
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
RING IN THE OLD

Some veterans of New York's punk era have burned out—R.I.P., Joey, Johnny, and Dee Dee—and many others have faded away. Patti Smith, on the other hand, has been absorbing and emitting energy like a poorly understood astronomical phenomenon, releasing new albums every few years and playing live shows that rival those that made her the patron saint of CBGB thirty years ago. Her run-through of the entire 1975 album "Horses" at BAM last year was one of the most viscerally affecting things I have ever seen. Her enthusiasm as a performer is never mere crowd-pleasing, and her lack of cynicism is never empty cheer. Smith is the fusion of two decades: she has the optimism and open-mindedness of sixties hippies as well as the skepticism and fire of seventies punks. Who else could sing a song like "People Have the Power" and make a roomful of icy New Yorkers come to their feet, sing along, and maybe even tear up? Not that we'd ever admit it. Smith and her band take the stage of the Bowery Ballroom Dec. 29-31 for their annual run of year-end shows.



—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

ture it has a weird, thrilling power. Through Dec. 23. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999.)

YUN-FEI JI
Flooding in the Yangtze River Valley caused by the Three Gorges Dam has displaced more than a million people in China. In Ji's dense, lyrical paintings on paper, the artist approaches the massive dam project as a still unfolding epic, mixing quotations from traditional scroll painting with images of wrecked bicycles, overloaded buses, refugees carrying bundled possessions on their backs, and grinning ghosts who float through passages of stippled brushwork that depict rocks, leaves, water, sky, and swirling human energies. Appropriately, given the mind-boggling scale of the project and its consequences, the delicately detailed panels are Ji's largest to date, and the show is titled "Water That Floats the Boat Can Also Sink It." Through Dec. 22. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

EZRA JOHNSON
This painter turned animator makes videos that mix lush, photographed brushwork with jerky movement, quick cuts, and recorded sound. "What Visions Burn" follows a couple of toughs in the aftermath of an art heist. "What Birds Remember If They Do Remember" is a less linear narrative that ends with hunters discovering a cache of paintings in a forest. The combination of the videos' rough-hewn look and pleasant guitar accompaniment makes for a nice lo-fi art experience—although, given the edginess and quality of much mainstream animation in the past decade, it's hard not to wish for more from Johnson's precious creations. Through Jan. 6. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

JANNIS KOUNELLIS
Displaced persons and refugee camps seem to be the referents in a new group of large-scale assemblages. Rolled packets of sheet iron, battered tables, metal beds, scuffed shoes, and grubby overcoats yanked or dragged through holes pierced in more sheet iron suggest a stage set on which mournful, symbolic violence will play out. The implied mise en scène is more a European ghetto than a village in Gaza, Darfur, or Iraq—but this time-space slippage may in itself be a useful historical mnemonic. Through Jan. 6. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

ALLAN MCCOLLUM
"Unique," it will be remembered, does not mean "unusual." It means nonpareil, one of a kind. This much abused buzzword is freshly sharpened in McCollum's "Shapes Project," which presents, in a comic nightmare of regimented specialness, a portfolio of two hundred and fourteen million unique shapes that "have been set aside for creative experimentation." (The plan is to eventually have one shape for every human being on the planet.) What this means in practice is a sloping floor on which more than seven thousand small, bloblike, black-framed prints are arrayed; the specs for the rest are available in a long shelf of binders. In the back room, an even more select group of shapes are realized in polished wood, like absurd children's toys. Through Dec. 23. (Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

IÑIGO MANGLANO-OVALLE
In 2005, Mies van der Rohe's architect grandson smashed a window in Crown Hall, on Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology campus, ushering in a renovation of the landmark building; in 1970, affiliates of the Weather Underground inadvertently blew up a town house in Greenwich Village. Manglano-Ovalle's exhibition presents a lyrical video of the first incident and a retablo-like painting of the second, along with a bulletproof umbrella, a giant child's jack with a sabre-sharp prong, and a video remixing the lyrics of Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." It all adds up to a muddled meditation on radical gestures as dubious cultural inheritance. Through Dec. 22. (Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.)

IVAN NAVÁRRO
Late-seventies and eighties postmodernism involved the mash-up of disparate sources, usually the more the better. Younger artists are more selective and specific. Take Navárro, for instance, who joins the fluorescent tubes of Dan Flavin with the furniture designs of great architects—Marcel Breuer, Gerrit Rietveld—to get his cutely titled "electric chairs." Low-end design makes an appearance in a wheelbarrow lined with fluorescent rods. A video finds him rolling the wheelbarrow around lonely stretches of industrial Brooklyn, accompanied by a mournful soundtrack. The results are pleasing, but not terribly substantial. Through Jan. 10. (Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180.)

ROBERT PRUITT
Pruitt is one of art's fiercer young voices, directing audiences away from the chichi and decorative and toward issues of race and cultural hegemony. This show sticks mostly to large-scale drawing, in conté on light-brown butcher paper, with figures mixing emblems from hip-hop and corporate culture (Nike, Louis Vuitton) to ur-African signifiers like woven baskets and grass skirts. A white leather "Slave Bible" stuffed with shards of broken pottery makes the connection between contemporary black culture and its origins, while two carved African figures wrapped in bandannas forge a link between the Old World and the New. The other spectres hanging over the show are the artists David Hammons and Fred Wilson, from whom Pruitt continues to borrow heavily. Through Jan. 6. (Clementine, 623 W. 27th St. 212-243-5937.)

FRANK STELLA
In different hands—which is to say, younger hands—Stella's bright paintings, with their spiralling forms and textured low-relief surfaces, might be titled after some kind of digital doodad or designer hallucinogen. The venerable minimalist turned maximalist takes the old-school approach, however, naming them after a work by the German Romantic writer Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811). The novella "Michael Kohlhaas" (1810) centers on a campaign of violence launched by the protagonist after his horses are illegally confiscated by a nobleman. There are no equestrian references in Stella's nonnarrative abstractions, although the vivid clash of colors and forms conveys the essence of Kleist's powerful portrait of human antagonism. Through Dec. 22. (Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

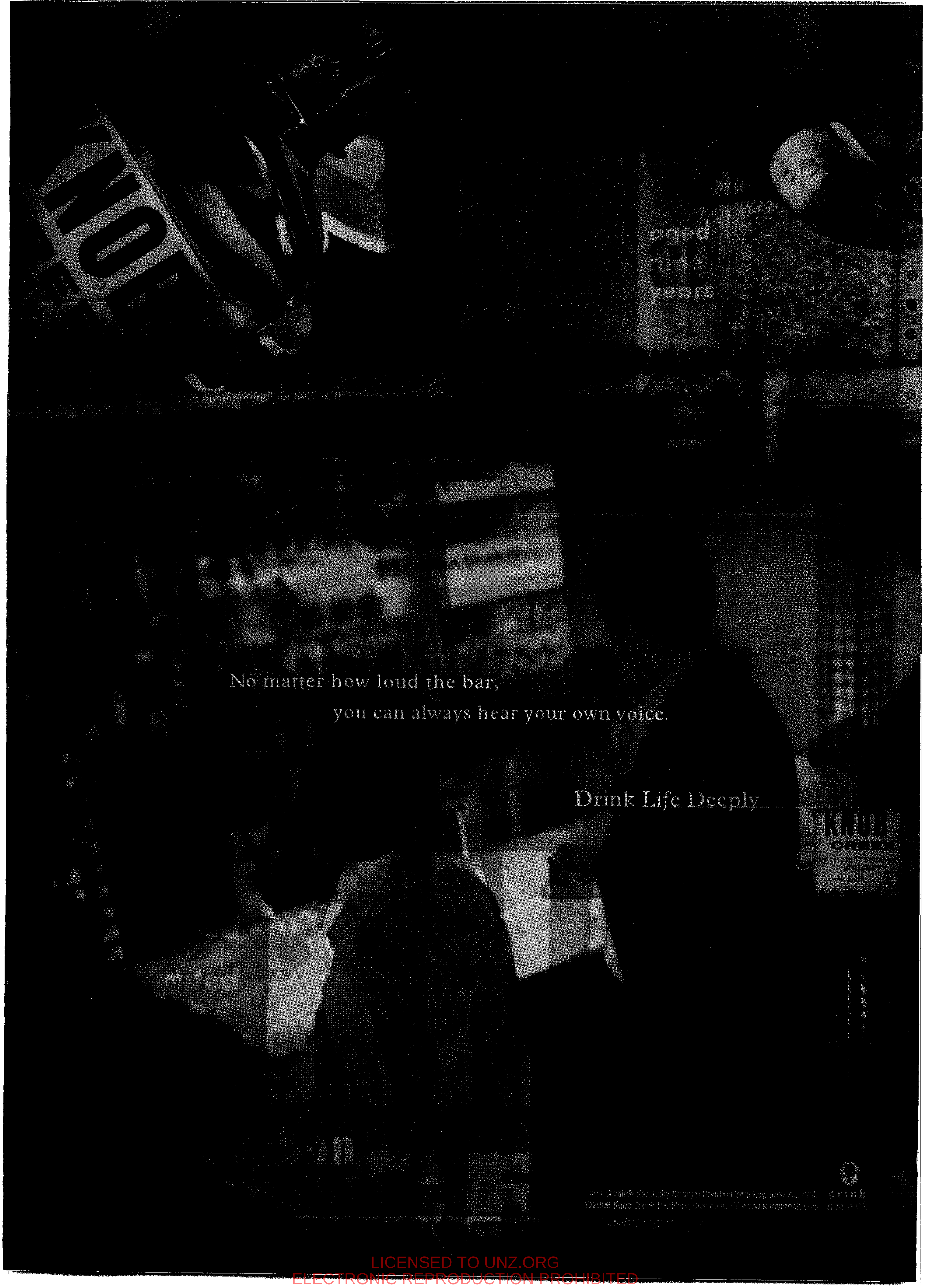
CHEYNEY THOMPSON
It's best not to worry too much about the conceptual apparatus surrounding Thompson's installation, with its ironic-pompous title "Quelques Aspects de l'Art Bourgeois: La Non-Intervention." Actually, the intervention is a pointed—and, in an oddball way, earnest—discussion of basic issues like form, color, and disposition in space. Five quintets of offset lithographs, in dingy rainbow colors, depict the same art-gallery storage bay with different configurations of rolled and stretched canvases stowed in it. A row of folding tables, their tinted tops progressing from white to black, form a giant version of a photographer's grayscale bar. Following the tables back through the gallery, one discovers—ta-da!—the actual storage bay. Rounding out the scene are four big abstract oil paintings, also in shades of gray. Through Jan. 6. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

"THE WAY OF ALL FLESH"
Skulls and skeletons used to signify vanitas, warning viewers to clean up their lives, acknowledge mortality, and prepare for the eternal hereafter; nowadays they conjure horror movies, heavy metal, and gothic fashion, but the look in art hasn't changed so much. Jacopo Ligozzi's circa-1600 study of a skull makes a nice partner to Alfred Steiner's drawings of skeletons posed after Giacometti and Charles Ray works; Angelo Filomeno's creepy anatomical drawings; and Vik Muniz's silly skull with a matching, bone-colored clown nose. Through Dec. 23. (BravinLee, 526 W. 26th St. 212-462-4404.)

Short List

DAVE ANDERSON: ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through Dec. 23. **ROBERT BECHTLE:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Jan. 6. **DAN FLAVIN:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Dec. 22. **MAUREEN GALLACE:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Dec. 22. **JOANNE GREENBAUM:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Dec. 23. **GAIL ALBERT HALABAN:** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN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212-989-7600. Through Jan. 6. **JEFF JACOBSON:** Peer, 526 W. 26th St. 212-741-6599. Through Jan. 6. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St., 522 W. 22nd St., and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 27. **FRED W. MCDARRAH:** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Jan. 6. **ENRIQUE METINIDES:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Jan. 13. **FRED SANDBACK:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 22. **ANDY WARHOL:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. and 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1111. Through Dec. 22.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

LEE FRIEDLANDER
For Friedlander fans, last year's enormous MOMA retrospective (now travelling) only whetted the appetite for more of the photographer's off-kilter brilliance. This show of forty vintage prints from the nineteen-seventies may not satisfy that craving, but its overfamiliar images are nicely balanced with previously unseen ones, and they're all so shrewdly arranged that the selection still pops. It opens with an on-the-road group that includes separate pictures of Friedlander, his wife, Maria, and his son, Erik, at the wheel, as well as a shot of a little wooden house heading west down the highway. Best speed bump: an image of the window of a Tampa photography studio featuring head shots of Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey surrounded by eight-by-ten glossies of strippers. Through Jan. 6. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

Short List

JONATHAN BOROFSKY: Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Dec. 23. **SLATER BRADLEY:** Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through Dec. 23. **NINA KATCHADOURIAN:** One Chase Manhattan Plaza. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Jan. 14.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

KATE GILMORE / DAVID C. SCHER
Gilmore's approach to performance art includes many of the elements present at its inception: dead-serious intent applied to absurd, self-assigned projects; a penchant for testing endurance; a hearty strain of masochism. But her works have a winsome streak. The whimsically titled "Main Squeeze" finds her crawling through a roughly constructed, claustrophobic tunnel, while in "Anything . . ." she cobbles together a tower of chairs to reach toward the sky—or the camera, at least. Both works function as metaphors for human, often Sisyphean, striving and as rousing cheers for the effort and resilience they evoke. Scher's messy but intricate paintings of cityscapes and imaginary worlds are like updated takes on Bosch or Brueghel, although suitably contemporary and obscure. Through Dec. 23. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET/ "THE NUTCRACKER"
In Balanchine's timeless version of the E. T. A. Hoffmann Christmas tale, the tree grows and grows, and the flowers waltz in the Land of Sweets. Casts are available on the company's Web site one week in advance. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 19, Dec. 21, Dec. 26, and Dec. 28 at 6; Dec. 20 and Dec. 27 at 2 and 6; Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 30 at 2 and 8; Dec. 24 at 1; and Dec. 29 at 8.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
During the final two weeks of the City Center season, three different casts rotate through "Pas de Duke," the challenging, classical-meets-modern duet that Ailey made for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Judith Jamison in 1976. (The Duke, of course, is Ellington.) The company also gets a chance to grow into Karole Armitage's contemplative new "Gamelan Gardens" and Twyla Tharp's "Golden Section" along with plenty of opportunities to do what they do best in "Revelations." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 20, Dec. 23, Dec. 27, and Dec. 30 at 2 and 8; Dec. 21-22 and Dec. 28-29 at 8; Dec. 24 at 7:30; and Dec. 26 and 31 at 7. See www.alvinailey.org for specific programs.)

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO
Léonide Massine's "Gaîté Parisienne" and Jerome Robbins's "The Cage" are the latest classics to get saucy reinterpretations by the all-male Trocks, who dance in drag and giant toe shoes. But the thirty-two-year-old troupe has more than inappropriate chest hair and camp on its side. Illuminating flashes of style and wit, and some unexpectedly lovely steps, provide texture along with the belly laughs. Two alternating programs stocked with repertory favorites include the company's fractured versions of "Swan Lake" (Act II), "Les Sylphides," and "The Dying Swan." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Dec. 19-20, Dec. 26-27, and Jan. 2 at 7:30; Dec. 21-22 and Dec. 28-29 at 8; Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 3 and 8; and Dec. 24 and Dec. 31 at 3. Through Jan. 7.)

MOVEOPOLIS!
Best known for dance-theatre projects like last April's "The Show (Achilles Heels)"—and for portraying Martha Graham in drag—Richard Move shows another side in a program of straight-up dance, tailored to his quintet of superb performers. In a revised version of "Lust" (2001), the former Bill T. Jones dancer Catherine Cabeen emphasizes the solo's self-devouring ugliness, while "Verdi Divertimento" (2004) finds Move working in a luxuriant vein. Move's latest work, "Toward the Delights of the Exquisite Corpse," includes a sound collage by Hilton Als, made primarily from music and text by the late composer Julius Eastman. Dancers in silvery bodysuits move in front of a giant screen while Charles Atlas mixes the background video live. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 19-23 at 7:30.)

"HOLIDAY WONDERS"
More than two hundred dancers and musicians from China, Canada, and the U.S. take the stage in this costumed spectacle built around Tang-dynasty folktales. Influences on the choreographers range from Tibetan and Chinese classical dance to ballet and Martha Graham, and the music runs the gamut from Chinese opera to Western-style Chinese pop. (Beacon Theatre, 2124 Broadway, at 74th St. 212-496-7070. Dec. 19 and Dec. 22 at 8, Dec. 21 and Dec. 23 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 24 at 2.)

"DANCE AND PROCESS"
Miguel Gutierrez curates this edition of the Kitchen's emerging-choreographer series; the performances are the result of seven weeks of structured feedback. Melanie Maar's "DOPA—Duo in Process" builds observations of the effects of Parkinson's disease into a study of motor control. Jillian Peña's "The Promised Land" offers what she terms an "imaginary landscape" through the medium of video. And Daniel Linehan, just two years out of college but already known for his curious brand of humor ("like a kid who pulls the wings off moths," says Gutierrez), presents "Human Content Pile." (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Dec. 20-21 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Julie Taymor's physically exuberant, if intellectually scattered, production of Mozart's **"Die Zauberflöte"** is nothing if not entertaining. The fine cast features Isabel Bayrakdarian, Cornelia Götz, Christoph Strehl, Nathan Gunn, Robert Lloyd, and Stephen Milling; James Levine, who likes to serve up Mozart rich and strong, conducts. (Dec. 20 and Jan. 1 at 8, Dec. 23 at 8:30, and Dec. 28 at 7:30. Note: Rodion Pogossov, a winning performer, takes over from Gunn beginning on Dec. 23; Scott Bergeson replaces the superior Levine on Dec. 23; and the great René Pape replaces Milling on Dec. 28 and Jan. 1.) ♦ Plácido Domingo takes the title role in the world-première performances of Tan Dun's **"The First Emperor,"**

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
THE NOKIA STORE

5 E. 57th St. (212-758-1980)—The Nokia Store makes the futuristic Apple Store look like Little House on the Prairie. The building's peacock-blue façade, one of the few parts of the store you cannot interface with, seems to be made out of gigantic plastic pieces from an educational toy. Inside the narrow, three-level, two-thousand-square-foot space, luminescent Plexiglas walls and Barry White-inflected music make you feel as if you'd walked into an airport cocktail lounge. Should you wish to change the color of the panels from magenta to cyan or any of the other sixty choices, sit down on a bar stool, pick up one of the cell phones attached to the counters that flank the room, and send a text message to the wall (actually, to a plasma screen). You can also click to control the images on screens, to switch, say, bubbling bubbles to alphabet letters blowing in the wind. Or you can send a note to the walls in any of the other five Nokia stores in the world. You can also walk upstairs, snap a picture of yourself with the superb optics built into the N93 phone, and print a copy of it to take home.

There is merchandise for sale, too, but retailing hardly seems to be the point. The salespeople—and there are a lot of them—work without commission and, if you ask, they will spend hours fixing your old Nokia or programming your new one. If you want to buy a Nokia phone here, you will pay roughly a hundred to a hundred and fifty dollars more than you would for the same equipment at another store, because at the Nokia Store it comes without a calling plan. "The store is about learning," Keith Nowak, manager of media relations, says. "It's the only place you can see the full line of Nokia devices and find out which is the best for your needs." And just who is in need of the gold and platinum diamond-encrusted phones found in the third-floor Vertu lounge ($4,800 to $150,000; $520 for an ostrich-leather case)? The price of these handsets includes the service for one year of a full-time concierge, who will, for instance, book theatre tickets and make dinner reservations. Sorry: price for your call to the concierge not included.

—Patricia Marx

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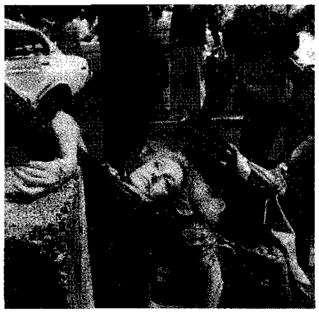
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DRAMATIC EXITS

Like Weegee, the Mexican photojournalist Enrique Metinides tuned in to police radio broadcasts so he could be the first to arrive at car accidents, train wrecks, explosions, suicides, and crime scenes. But the pictures he made for the newspaper *La Prensa* and a slew of Mexican pulp magazines from the early nineteen-fifties until his forced retirement, in 1997, weren't merely sensational. Metinides, who says he learned his craft by watching gangster and action movies, knew how to zero in on the brutal drama of an incident by staking out a position that was at once intimate and omniscient. His best photos would be the envy of any photographer interested in restaging reality, so it's no wonder they've been appearing in galleries recently, and the group now at Anton Kern, in Chelsea, is terrific. Among them is a 1974 shot of three attractive teen-agers sprawled next to their crashed sports car which Warhol would have silk-screened in a heartbeat. But the victim of another auto accident, a pretty blond woman who doesn't seem to realize she's dead, steals the show by forcing us to confront her unknowing gaze.

—*Vince Aletti*



ENRIQUE METINIDES, "UNTITLED" (1979)

an epic tale of ancient China. Millions know Tan for his music for the film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," which was directed by Zhang Yimou; Zhang also does the honors here, presiding over an elaborate production created with the set designer Fan Yue. (Ha Jin co-wrote the libretto with Zhang.) Also with the estimable Elizabeth Futral, Paul Groves, and Susanne Mentzer; Tan, an experienced conductor, is on the podium. (Dec. 21, Dec. 26, Dec. 29, and Jan. 2 at 8.) ♦ The final performance of **"Rigoletto,"** Verdi's sturdiest warhorse, features the newcomers Ekaterina Siurina, Kate Aldrich, and Piotr Beczala, with the more seasoned Carlos Alvarez and Robert Lloyd; Friedrich Haider. (Dec. 22 at 8.) ♦ Verdi's magnificent **"Don Carlo"** features Patricia Racette, Olga Borodina, Johan Botha, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Samuel Ramey, with René Pape offering a performance of extraordinary intensity as King Philip; Levine. (Dec. 23 at 1. This is the final performance.) ♦ "Die Zauberflöte" returns for the holidays not only in the full German version but in an abridged English-language version, **"The Magic Flute,"** ideal for families and opera newbies (and offered at lower prices). The Met has not stinted on casting, with Erika Miklósa, Matthew Polenzani, Gunn, and Pape among the featured performers; Levine himself conducts. (Dec. 29 and Jan. 1-2 at 1 and Dec. 30 at 1:30. Note: Pape sings on Dec. 30 only.) ♦ The Met's newish production of Bellini's **"I Puritani,"** a veritable feast for coloratura addicts, was created for Renée Fleming, but with the stupendous Anna Netrebko now taking the role of Elvira Walton it should experience a rebirth. The men in her life are Eric Cutler, Franco Vassallo, and John Relyea; Patrick Summers. (Dec. 27 and Dec. 30 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA: "DIE FLEDERMAUS"
Anthony Amato's feisty band of professional and amateur singers give their all in a run of Johann Strauss II's frothy Viennese comedy, sung in English. (Amato Opera Theater, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Dec. 23 and Dec. 29-31 at 7:30 and Dec. 24 at 2:30. Through Jan. 7.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"
The world's favorite Christmas piece is always well served in Manhattan; the annual flurry of performances continues. Dec. 20-21 at 7:30 and Dec. 22-23 at 8: The New York Philharmonic, a relatively late entry into the city's "Messiah" stakes, offers a run of highly polished performances, led this year by the estimable Baroque specialist Harry Bicket and featuring a superb lineup of vocal soloists: Dominique Labelle, Stephanie Blythe, Bruce Ford, and Neal Davies. The Westminster Symphonic Choir assists. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-875-5656.) ♦ Dec. 20 and Dec. 22 at 8: Richard Westenburg's Musica Sacra Chorus and Orchestra has for decades offered one of the finest "Messiah"s in New York, strong, lean, and expertly paced. The noted Judith Pannill, Ryland Angel, William Hite, and Richard Zeller take the solo parts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.) ♦ Dec. 23 at 3 and 8: Another good Carnegie option is offered by the Masterwork Chorus, a long-established avocational group with a professional orchestra, under the command of Andrew Megill. (212-247-7800.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With half the orchestra's personnel taking part in "Messiah," the others stay downtown to perform a festive instrumental program of works by Bach, Corelli (the "Christmas Concerto"), and Handel (the "Water Music"); Bernard Labadie, a Canadian maestro with an exceptional lyrical gift, conducts. (Dec. 20-21 at 7:30, Dec. 22 at 2, and Dec. 23 at 8.) ♦ The Phil rings in the New Year with the engaging vocalist Audra McDonald, who will offer favorite songs from such films as "My Fair Lady," "The Wizard of Oz," and "A Little Night Music"; Ted Sperling conducts. (Dec. 31 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

JUILLIARD CHORAL UNION
Judith Clurman leads her charges through a Christmas-Hannukah program featuring music by Bach, Vaughan Williams, and Paul Schoenfield (the world première of "Al Hanisim"). (Peter J. Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. Dec. 20 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

"REJOICE GREATLY: CHRISTMAS WITH RENÉE FLEMING"
The Beautiful Voice holds the stage of Carnegie Hall along with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the conductor Daniel Beckwith, singing selections by Handel, Reger, and Bernstein along with a host of traditional songs. (212-247-7800. Dec. 21 at 8.)

POMERIUM: "CREATOR OF THE STARS"
Alexander Blachly's exceptional early-music chamber choir comes to the Cloisters, upper Manhattan's authentically medieval venue, to offer a distinguished Christmas program in which a selection of Gregorian chants is paired with a variety of polyphonic chant-based works by such masters as Byrd, Dufay, and Palestrina. (Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2290. Dec. 23 at 1 and 3.)

NEW YORK STRING ORCHESTRA
Carnegie Hall's proud holiday tradition, a convocation of young virtuosos under the guidance of Jaime Laredo, offers two concerts. Dec. 24 at 7: The violinist Jennifer Koh joins Laredo (on viola) for Mozart's beloved Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major, the centerpiece of an all-Mozart program also featuring the "Linz" Symphony. ♦ Dec. 28 at 8: Things get a little heavier when the mighty Leon Fleisher joins the group for Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1; preceding it are Joan Tower's "Made in America" and Beethoven's bouncy Eighth Symphony. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
There are few places more evocative of Christmas than the Medieval Sculpture Hall. The Met's series of holiday concerts closes with the excellent choir of Trinity Church, Wall Street, which will sing a selection of lessons and carols under the direction of Owen Burdick. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 21 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

AXIOM
Jeffrey Milarsky, a trusted hand in the most challenging music, conducts this new Juilliard ensemble devoted to the classic repertory of the twentieth century. Their latest concert features such works as Boulez's "Derive," Stockhausen's "Kreuzspiel," and Milhaud's "La Création du Monde." (Juilliard Studio 309, at 60 Lincoln Center Plaza. Dec. 21 at 8. No tickets required.)

THE WESTERN WIND: "HOLIDAY LIGHT"
The versatile vocal sextet continues its tradition of performing Hannukah and Christmas music (including Renaissance, Early American, and Sephardic songs) in a concert at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew. (86th St. and W. End Ave. 212-873-2848. Dec. 23 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
The floating chamber-music series always adds its part to the holiday cheer; a crackling fire and intermission wine and cheese make for a friendly, old-Brooklyn atmosphere. The music is all Bach. Dec. 24 at 4: Steven Beck, one of the city's most admired young pianists, plays on Christmas Eve, offering a late-afternoon performance of the Goldberg Variations. ♦ Dec. 31 at 7: A company of the city's finest freelance musicians—including Beck, the violinist Mark Peskanov, the violist Nicholas Cords, and the cellist Edward Arron—gathers to perform the Concerto for Violin and Oboe and the Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 2-6. (Fulton Ferry Landing. 718-624-2083.)

ARTEK: "A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC"
Gwendolyn Toth's fine early-music band gets on the Mozart birthday bandwagon just in time, offering such chestnuts as "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and arias from "Don Giovanni" and "Il Re Pastore"; the violinist Enrico Gatti leads from the concertmaster's chair. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. Dec. 30 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

92ND STREET Y: THE ROMEROS
Three generations of the renowned family of guitarists—including Pepe Romero himself—offer a classic Spanish program on New Year's Eve (with free champagne at intermission). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 31 at 8.)

ARIUM
Vassily Primakov and Konstantin Soukhovetski, two exceptional young Russian pianists, offer a New Year's Eve program (featuring works by Beethoven and Corigliano and selections from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker") at the fashionable downtown space, where wine and hors d'oeuvres can be enjoyed along with the music. (31 Little W. 12th St. 212-463-8630. Dec. 31 at 4.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLACK CHRISTMAS
Glen Morgan directed this remake of the 1974 horror film, about a group of sorority sisters who are murdered over Christmas break. Opening Dec. 25. (In wide release.)

THE CASE OF THE GRINNING CAT
A documentary by Chris Marker about the political implications of a ubiquitous type of graffiti in Paris. In French. Opening Dec. 20. (Film Forum.)

CHILDREN OF MEN
A drama by Alfonso Cuarón, set in 2030, about the last pregnant woman in a world in which children can no longer be conceived. Starring Clive Owen, Julianne Moore, Michael Caine, and Chiwetel Ejiofor. Opening Dec. 25. (In wide release.)

CURSE OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER
Zhang Yimou directed this drama, starring Gong Li and Chow Yun Fat, about political intrigue and rebellion in tenth-century China. In Mandarin. Opening Dec. 21. (In wide release.)

THE DEAD GIRL
Karen Moncrieff directed this drama, about a group of people whose lives connect through their relationship to a murdered woman. Starring Brittany Murphy, Mary Steenburgen, Marcia Gay Harden, and Mary Beth Hurt. Opening Dec. 29. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 22. (In wide release.)

LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 20. (In wide release.)

MATTHEW BARNEY: NO RESTRAINT
A documentary about the artist, directed by Alison Chernick. Opening Dec. 20. (IFC Center.)

MISS POTTER
A bio-pic about Beatrix Potter, in which her fantastic creations come to life. Starring Renée Zellweger, Ewan McGregor, and Emily Watson; directed by Chris Noonan. Opening Dec. 29. (In limited release.)

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM
A comedy about a security guard (Ben Stiller) who gets locked into the Museum of Natural History at night, when the exhibits come to life. Co-starring Robin Williams; directed by Shawn Levy. Opening Dec. 22. (In wide release.)

NOTES ON A SCANDAL
A drama, directed by Richard Eyre, about a teacher (Cate Blanchett) who has an affair with a student. Co-starring Judi Dench and Bill Nighy. Opening Dec. 25. (In wide release.)

THE PAINTED VEIL
An Englishwoman (Naomi Watts) who is unhappily married to a scientist (Edward Norton) travels to China to fight cholera and meets another man (Liev Schreiber). Opening Dec. 20. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

PAN'S LABYRINTH
Guillermo del Toro directed this drama of a girl who lives in a fantasy world after Franco's takeover of Spain. Opening Dec. 29. (In wide release.)

PERFUME
Tom Tykwer directed this adaptation of Patrick Süskind's novel, about a man who exudes no scent but creates great perfumes. Starring Ben Whishaw, Dustin Hoffman, and Alan Rickman. Opening Dec. 27. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ROCKY BALBOA
Sylvester Stallone directed and stars in the sixth installment of the franchise. Co-starring Burt Young. Opening Dec. 22. (In wide release.)

THE TIGER AND THE SNOW
A comedy-drama, directed by and starring Roberto Benigni, about an Italian poet who goes to Baghdad to help the woman he loves (Nicoletta Braschi) after she is wounded. In Arabic, English, and Italian. Opening Dec. 29. (Quad Cinema.)

VENUS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 20. (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3 and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

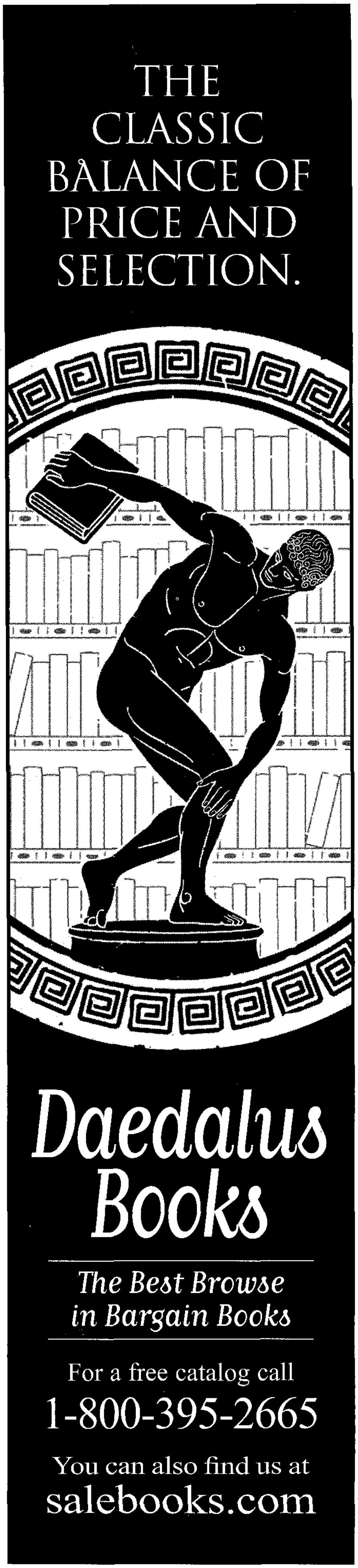
WE ARE MARSHALL
McG directed this inspirational sports drama, based on a true story, about two coaches (Matthew McConaughey and Matthew Fox) who started a new football team at Marshall College after most of the team was killed in a plane crash. Opening Dec. 22. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

APOCALYPTO
The latest project from Mel Gibson is nothing if not ambitious. His actors are little known or unknown, and the dialogue is delivered wholly in a dialect of Mayan. Yet the movie's appeal derives from its full-blooded, not to say traditional, devotion to unstinting action; apart from a brief lull in which a tribe listens to a storyteller by firelight, the film has a remorselessness that verges on the exhausting. Jaguar Paw (Rudy Youngblood) is wrenched from his village and—with a crew of companions, but without his wife and child—dragged through the jungle by the fearsome Zero Wolf (Raoul Trujillo) to one of the great Mayan temples. Some viewers may lack the stomach for what follows, not least because some characters end up lacking more than a stomach. Hearts are plucked as easily as strawberries; a fine red mist sprays from a beaten brain. The portrait of a culture defined by violence is a convincing one, even if Gibson's motive for steeping himself in the particulars of cruelty may be too murky to bear examination. His hand slips only toward the end, where the sense of melodrama, rising like a flood, brims over into the ludicrous.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/18/06.) (In wide release.)

BABEL
Alejandro González Iñárritu creates savagely beautiful and heartbreaking images, he gets fearless performances out of his actors, he edits with the sharpest razor inside any computer in Hollywood, and he also abuses his audience with a humorless fatalism and a piling up of calamities that border on the absurd. "Babel" is set in Morocco, Tokyo, and both Southern California and northern Mexico. The movie has three stories—all touching on relationships between parents and children—which have been arbitrarily linked together by the will of the director and his collaborator, the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. Their theme is the pathos of ignorance. All over the world, terrible things are happening, and we cannot know them or feel them, but an eagle-eyed artist, as he spans the globe, can connect us. As a mood, this globalized empathy is a noble enterprise. As a method of constructing a movie, it's hopeless.—*David Denby* (10/30/06) (In wide release.)

BLOOD DIAMOND
A rousing, old-fashioned romantic adventure tale set against the civil war in Sierra Leone in 1999. Djimon Hounsou is a fisherman whose young son is abducted by the thuggish Revolutionary United Front and turned into a killer. Hounsou, forced by the R.U.F. to work in the diamond fields, finds and hides a very big stone. Leonardo DiCaprio, looking and sounding tougher than in the past, is a cynical diamond smuggler who wants to get hold of it, and Jennifer Connelly, flirtatious and avid for once, is a danger-junkie magazine reporter who cozies up to DiCaprio in order to find out how diamonds are smuggled out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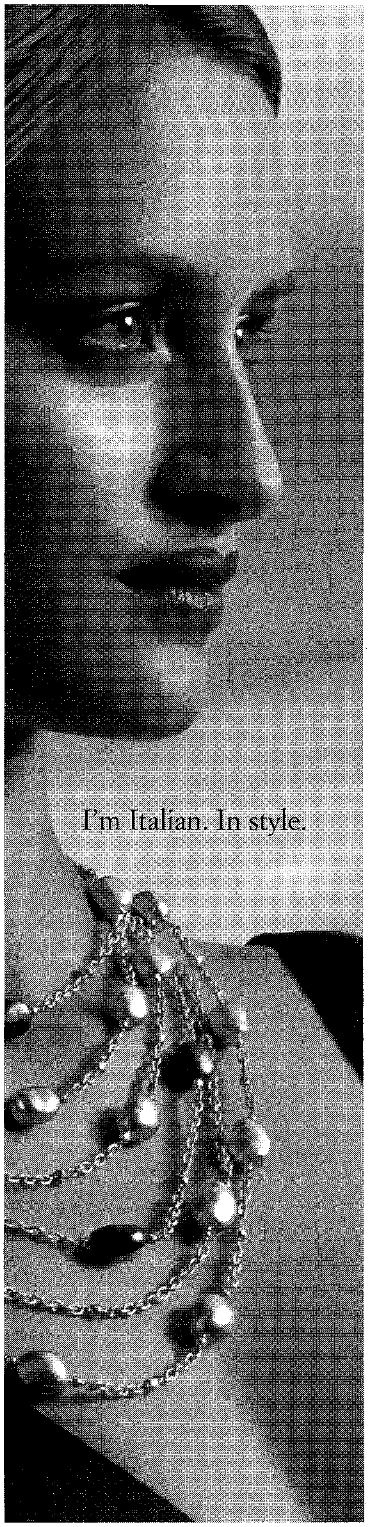
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of the country and sold to Europeans for arms money that fuels the endless war. These three take turns using, helping, and half-trusting one another as young killers rampage through the country firing AK-47s from the backs of pickup trucks. The director, Edward Zwick, stays poised on the edge of popular romance, and that turns out to be a good place to be; he does serious work there, pulling back from the obvious and digging deeper into Africa's troubles. Written by Charles Leavitt, from an idea that he developed with C. Gaby Mitchell.—*D.D.* (12/11/06) (In wide release.)

BOBBY

In Emilio Estevez's film, Senator Robert F. Kennedy is seen in newsreels and occasionally from the rear as a figure moving through the old Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on the night of his assassination, June 4, 1968. Yet "Bobby" is devoted not to him but to such things as the marital difficulties of the hotel's hair stylist (Sharon Stone) and manager (William H. Macy), the soft meanderings of two retired gents in the lobby (Anthony Hopkins and Harry Belafonte), the psychedelic misadventures of a pair of truant campaign workers (Brian Geraghty and Shia LaBeouf), and many other little tales, starring Demi Moore, Estevez himself, Christian Slater, Heather Graham, Martin Sheen, Helen Hunt, Elijah Wood, and several others. The intersecting stories are meant to suggest the range of American character types, from base to noble, and also the conflicting feelings of vanity, fear, and idealism that Bobby Kennedy might have reconciled and harmonized in a Presidential campaign. But Estevez's script never rises above earnest banality. And didn't anyone suggest to him that you can't throw a movie-celebrity party about an assassination?—*D.D.* (11/27/06) (In wide release.)

BORAT

Somewhere inside the sound and fury that have shrouded this project is a short, gross, and very funny series of sketches, lightly knotted together into a modern picaresque. Sacha Baron Cohen, the British performer behind Ali G, brings his yet more notorious invention, the Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev, to the United States, where his shameless curiosity, not to mention a reckless indifference to political correctness, is designed to cause maximum offense. The plot, if you can call it that, demands that Borat travel across the country to find Pamela Anderson: a noble quest, even if it does mean putting that distinguished actress in a sack. Some of the time, our hero is accompanied by his manager, Azamat (Ken Davitian), and also by a live bear, although Azamat looks more like a bear than the bear does. There are jokes thrown at Jews, African-Americans, rodeo fans, homosexuals, and, for good measure, the rest of the population. The smart explanation for this is that Baron Cohen, who is Jewish himself, is assaulting intolerance wherever he finds it; what he cannot control is the fate of the film itself, and one wonders whether, to a late-night college audience, say, the irony behind Borat would be of much concern. Could the movie become a safety valve, encouraging its fans to let off steam?—*A.L.*(11/6/06) (In wide release.)

CASINO ROYALE

James Bond returns in a new incarnation. Much of the debate that preceded this twenty-first installment of 007 revolved around the appointment of Daniel Craig to the leading role; a more pressing question was whether the ailing Bond franchise itself deserved to survive. The solution, as controlled by the director Martin Campbell, is to put the narrative on a low-carb diet: no fatty subplots, no indigestible villains, a minimum of frills. Our hero is pure protein, frequently bloodied, and the movie is rich in tenderizing violence; the torture scene, lifted grimly from Ian Fleming's novel, is unfit for younger viewers. The plot requires Bond to outwit Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen), a banker to the world's terrorists; given the film's paucity of gadgets, 007 must rely on his gambling skills, his fists, and the comforting presence of Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), who introduces herself with the words "I'm the money." The movie is ominously long, but, for the first time in many years, we are steered away from silliness and toward Fleming's vision of a bitter and undependable world. With Judi Dench as M.—*A.L.* (11/20/06) (In wide release.)

DÉJÀ VU

In this new thriller directed by Tony Scott and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer—a veteran pair of pyromaniacs if there ever was one—five hundred and forty-three men, women, and children board a New Orleans ferry and are promptly blown sky-high by a terrorist. Scott then makes pretty pictures out of the flaming bodies shooting through the air and falling into the water. This bit of senseless exploitation, it turns out, is a tease. Denzel Washington, playing an ace A.T.F. agent, gets sent by a fabulous time machine to a period four days earlier so that he can try to prevent the deaths of the passengers and a beautiful young woman (Paula Patton). Scott directs the intricate science-fiction action with unusual precision but cuts each episode like crazy. The result is a jumpy, well-engineered nonsensical entertainment. With Jim Caviezel as a fanatical anti-government killer. Written by Bill Marsilii and Terry Rossio.—*D.D.* (12/11/06) (In wide release.)

DREAMGIRLS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Movies about movies are as old as the movies; Christopher Guest, who has already made a movie about the compromises to which filmmakers submit ("The Big Picture," from 1989), now returns to the fray. His new farce stars Catherine O'Hara as the leading lady in a cheap family drama entitled "Home for Purim"—too shabby and antiquated, frankly, to be credible. She hears a whisper of an Oscar nomination and sets about cranking up the buzz; the same goes for her co-stars, played by Harry Shearer and Parker Posey. Guest himself takes the role of the director, and brings along his usual repertory players, including Bob Balaban, Michael McKean, Eugene Levy, and John Michael Higgins. They are as welcome as ever—so is Fred Willard, playing the host of a Hollywood-crazed TV show—but, by the standards of this group's previous projects, such as "Best in Show" and Rob Reiner's "This Is Spinal Tap," the result feels both tame and unsubtle. Only O'Hara finds pathos amid the delusions of the trade; the sight of her, surgically enhanced and squeezed into a minidress, is almost too much to bear. She deserves some sort of award.—*A.L.* (12/4/06) (In wide release.)

THE FOUNTAIN

Darren Aronofsky's new film, his first since "Requiem for a Dream," stars Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz in three interwoven roles. In the world of today, he is a research scientist and she is his dying wife. In the sixteenth century, he is a conquistador in the jungles of Central America and she is the queen who sends him there. In the distant future, he is a space traveller and she is his saintly muse, floating together through the void in a lovely bubble. One knows how they feel. The link between these tales appears to be a tree, the life-giving properties of which have turned it into a grail for those in search of eternity. Viewers who like to construe "2001: A Space Odyssey" as a serious philosophical statement should have no problem with Aronofsky's movie, whereas more skeptical souls will treat it as a finely acted, beautifully shot compendium of nonsense—well-meaning, if any actual meaning can be discerned. With Ellen Burstyn, as elegantly persuasive as ever, in the role of the scientist's boss.—*A.L.* (12/4/06) (In wide release.)

THE GOOD GERMAN

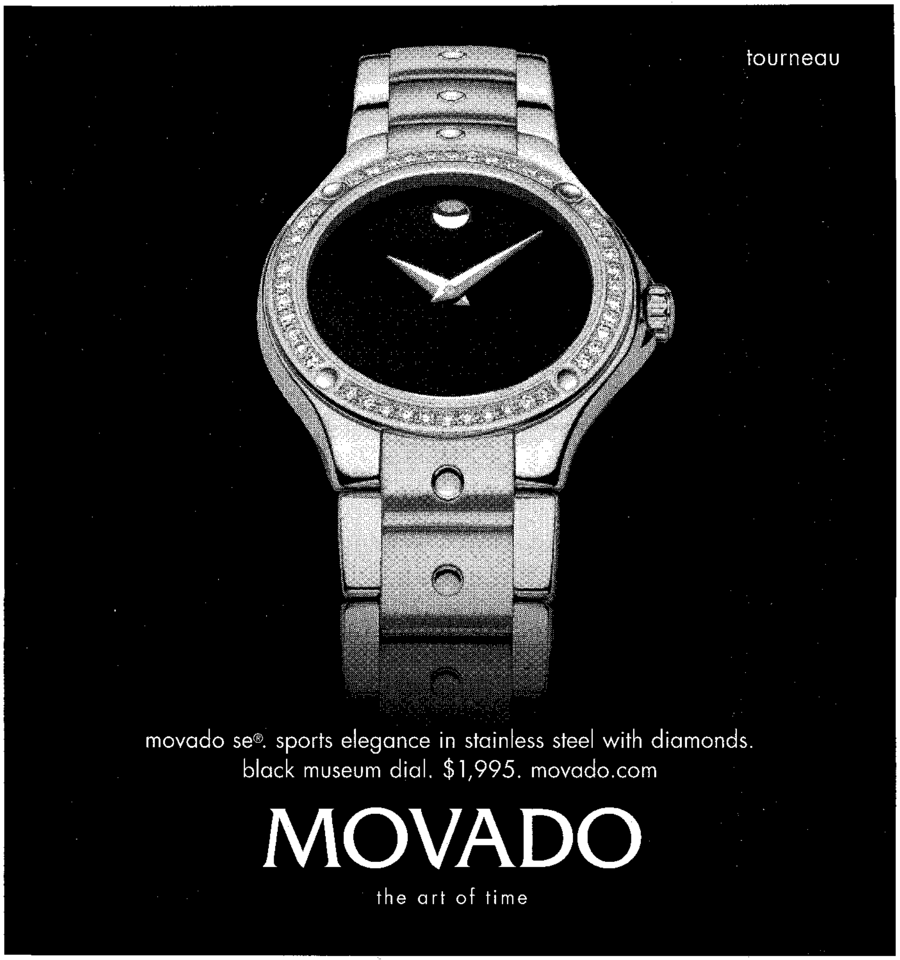
Shortly after the end of the Second World War, a reporter named Jake Geismer (George Clooney) returns to Berlin, where he meets an old flame named Lena Brandt (Cate Blanchett). By coincidence, she is now the girlfriend of Geismer's young and unsavory driver (Tobey Maguire); her husband, presumed dead, used to work for the German V-2 program, which means that various interested parties would like to find her. Such is the tangled setup of Steven Soderbergh's new movie, which not only pays homage to the films of the period but makes a concerted effort to resemble them, from the glow of the monochrome images down to the shaky plainness of the credits. This is smart and endearing for a while, but you soon want to ask: why bother? Why seek to replicate back-projection, for instance, when those compelled to use it at the time would have been thrilled to find something more realistic? And, above all, is the Berlin of 1945, with its dense political divisions and its barely shifted burden of immense suffering, the right place in which to practice an artistic game? As if destabilized by these uncertainties, the main players lack definition; it is left to the supporting actors—notably Leland Orser, as an American war-crimes investigator—to summon the air of troubled inquiry that the story needs.—*A.L.* (12/18/06) (In wide release.)

HAPPY FEET
This exuberant animated film, directed like a musical Biblical epic by George Miller, concerns a misfit penguin, Mumble (voiced by Elijah Wood), whose gift for tap dancing (extraordinarily motion-captured from Savion Glover's footwork) is seen as somewhat un-penguin by members of his all-singing tribe. When their fish supply dwindles, Mumble is blamed and forced to leave the flock, but his wanderings eventually lead him to discover the true nature of the problem. Along the way, many inconvenient truths are addressed, and the film's surprising political resonance gives it an independent, risk-taking tone. Yet it's all gently handled, and the quasi-gospel musical numbers (including a strikingly beautiful take on the Queen tune "Somebody to Love") and the soaring, lovely animation combine to make pop entertainment at its best.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE HISTORY BOYS
This adaptation of Alan Bennett's effervescent play comes alive on the screen. The setting is Yorkshire in the nineteen-eighties—a grammar school at which a group of eight boys, seven of them very bright, are being prepped for mind-crushing exams that could lead to a place to read history at Oxford or Cambridge. No actual classrooms could ever have been as animated as these: the boys talk back to their teachers, and everyone seems familiar with the details of everyone else's private life. Bennett's conceit is that the classroom is a theatre in which learning is acquired as much by performance as by study. There, wit is a form of action, and music and poetry create and release emotions too private to be spoken. The two principal teachers are Hector (Richard Griffiths), a sixtyish humanist who believes in educating souls, and his antagonist, Irwin (Stephen Campbell Moore), a slick new man, who teaches clever exam-taking skills. With Dominic Cooper as Dakin, the cunning, dark-eyed seducer, and Samuel Barnett as the smooth-cheeked Posner, physically younger than the other boys and hopelessly in love with Dakin. Posner sings Rodgers-and-Hart ballads; he's like a Shakespearean boy actor offering plaintive Elizabethan ballads in the interludes between action.—*D.D.* (11/27/06) (In wide release.)

LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA
In the second half of Clint Eastwood's Iwo Jima pairing, the director tells the story of the gruesome battle again, this time from within the caves and tunnels that the Americans assaulted in "Flags of Our Fathers." Now the Japanese are the staunch heroes, and the Americans are the Other—faceless invaders hitting the island in overwhelming numbers. Eastwood, working with a screenplay by Iris Yamashita, is interested less in the actual fighting than in the fierce struggle between the death cultists among the Japanese and the common soldiers who merely want to survive. The movie is a little stiff and repetitive, but it's a stirringly noble and generous enterprise. Starring Ken Watanabe as General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the commander of the Japanese resistance, and Kazunari Ninomiya, a soldier who wants to resume his life as a baker. In Japanese.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

MAINE-OCEAN EXPRESS
Jacques Rozier's 1986 road comedy demands patience, which is itself the subject of the film. The antic trouble begins with the first shot, when Dejanira (Rosa-Maria Gomes), a Brazilian samba dancer in Paris who doesn't speak French, rushes to catch the eponymous train and gets into the wrong car. Hassled by a pair of madcap conductors (Luis Rego and Bernard Menez), she meets a lawyer (Lydia Feld) who comes to her aid on the way to meeting a client in Nantes, a raucous, rustic sailor (the eruptive Yves Afonso). Somehow the five of them end up together at the coast, joined by Dejanira's New York impresario (Pedro Armendáriz, Jr.). En route—and there is plenty of route—the shaggy-dog band experience violence, love, and rapid reversals of fortune. Staging complex comedy setups in daring, exquisite long takes of a tightrope virtuosity, Rozier builds to an amaz-



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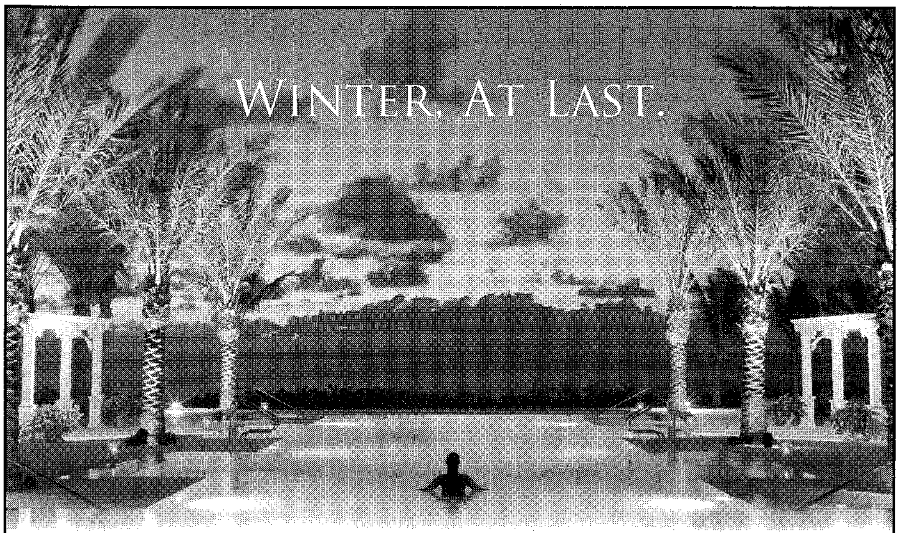

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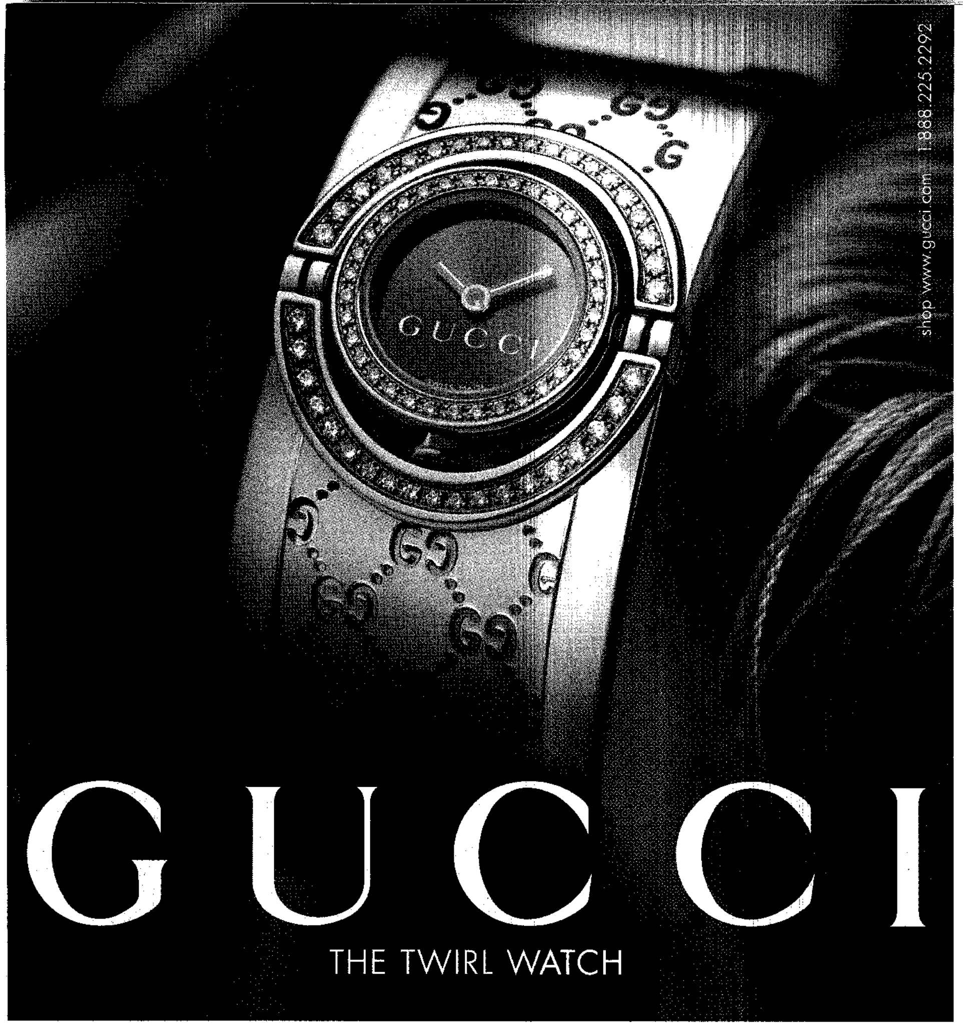

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ing sudden decrescendo, a half-hour-long return to order that is one of the most stirring adventures in banal sublimity ever committed to film. In French and Portuguese.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; Dec. 28 and Dec. 30.)

THE QUEEN

The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales, in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS

Isabel Coixet directs this restrained drama, in which Hanna (Sarah Polley), an ascetic hearing-impaired factory worker, is forced to take a holiday, which she promptly forsakes to work as a nurse for a temporarily blind burn victim, Josef (Tim Robbins), on an oil rig in the Irish Sea. Although Coixet's distracting use of sound and music sets a disjointed tone, the persistent isolation of the few habitants of the rig enhances the gradual development of the relationship between the damaged Hanna and the angry, helpless Josef. The dual elements of terror and romance at the core of the story are realized beautifully by the two leads: Polley, as an empty shell of a person, and Robbins, as a feeling, sensitive man, bring to life a pair of lost souls attempting to live with untold past horrors.—*Shauna Lyon* (Quad Cinema.)

STRANGER THAN FICTION

The existence of Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) is of no interest, even to Harold Crick. He works for the Internal Revenue Service, never takes vacations, and always cleans his teeth with the same number of brushstrokes. His life is described to us, in crisp female voice-over; little by little, we realize that Harold himself is listening to the voice, and that he is something even worse than dull. He is fictional, a character in a novel, and the narrator is in fact his creator, Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson), who is trying to find a way to kill him off. Moviegoers already exhausted by "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation" may wince at such a conceit, but the screenwriter, Zach Helm, and the director, Marc Forster, pull it off—they actually work through the comic implications of the setup, including the idea that it may not turn out funny after all. (Harold is devastated when he reads the manuscript of his story and understands that, in the name of art, he must indeed expire.) Dustin Hoffman is in relaxed and winning form as the literature professor to whom the hero takes his problem, and Maggie Gyllenhaal is the free spirit who thaws his iced-up heart. The ending may be mush, but the rest of Forster's movie has surprising bite.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

VENUS

Doing the "Grumpy Old Men" routine alongside several other showmen of his vintage, Peter O'Toole is as sly as ever as Maurice Russell, an aging and ailing actor who is a bit less grumpy than his friends, especially when it comes to Jessie (Jodie Whittaker), a provincial girl of twenty who moves in with her fussy great-uncle Ian, Maurice's best friend. About to go in for a prostate operation and in need of feminine comfort, Maurice makes the uncouth, slatternly young woman the nearest target for his seductions. Whittaker soldiers on bravely as the would-be Galatea, and Vanessa Redgrave, as his struggling ex-wife, whom he had left years earlier for a younger woman, is plausibly miserable, but it's O'Toole's vehicle, and it runs on the majestic flow of his voice (he makes even the word "cunt" sound like a term of endearment). Yet the screenwriter, Hanif Kureishi, and the director, Roger Michell, shamelessly milk the pathos of infirmity, lurching heedlessly from one prefabricated poignancy to another. The result is a schmaltzy grab bag of Hallmark moments.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

VOLVER

The new film from Pedro Almodóvar stars Penélope Cruz as Raimunda, who is soon seen mopping up the blood of her murdered husband—slain by her daughter, whom he tried to abuse—and stashing him in a freezer. This being Almodóvar, such horrors have a jaunty edge, and the colors (red gore against blue floor) are picked out with an unembarrassed eye. The story is more or less a male-free zone, and any other director would be chastised for training his camera so devotedly on a succession of cleavages. We follow Raimunda's timid sister (Lola Dueñas) as she mourns her aunt (Chus Lampreave) and then takes up, quite happily, with the ghost of her dead mother (Carmen Maura). Misfortune has befallen every generation, yet the victims are more resigned than surprised, as if, like the cheery local hooker (María Isabel Díaz), they know all men are traitors to begin with. Hitchcockians will warm to the credit sequence, which could be by Saul Bass, and to the score, which shimmers with echoes of Bernard Herrmann; even Hitchcock, however, might have balked at the level of emotional control that Almodóvar exerts upon his characters. You feel yourself gripped by a beautiful machine, engineered for the finest melodrama. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (11/6/06) (In wide release.)

WALKABOUT

An outback survival saga, directed and photographed by Nicolas Roeg on location in Australia, which is as redolent of its period in cultural (or rather, countercultural) history as "Easy Rider." Its symbolic contours are blatant: even before the businessman father of a young boy and a teen-age girl drives them into the wilderness, attempts to kill them, and then commits suicide, Roeg's superbly expressive camera conveys the message that white society is life-denying and anti-nature. That theme never disappears (unfortunately), but once the siblings (Lucien John and Jenny Agutter) are on their own magic breaks out everywhere. There's a wonderful disorientation scene at a bird-ridden, berry-flecked oasis that dries up without warning or explanation; luckily, a youthful Aboriginal (David Gumpilil) appears, and, though he doesn't understand a word the siblings are saying, he allows them to join his walkabout, a rite-of-passage trek across the plains and desert which requires him to hunt and scavenge for his food. The rippling Gumpilil and the nubile, limber Agutter are splendidly sensual camera subjects: their opposing presences magnetize Roeg's dreamy, erotic montages and landscapes. The young man communicates better with the boy, who's terrific at blurting and gesticulating, but the girl touches him more deeply; therein lies the tragedy. Released in 1971.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Dec. 22-28.)

WILD MAN BLUES

Following Woody Allen on a 1996 concert tour through Europe with his New Orleans-style jazz band, the documentary filmmaker Barbara Kopple touchingly reveals the inextricable unity of the man and his movie persona—and suggests the psychic conflicts at the heart of his great films. Travelling with Soon-Yi Previn and his sister, Letty Aronson, Allen delivers the same scintillating patter that marks his films and, unsurprisingly, seems as idiosyncratically fussy in life as in art. Here, however, he flaunts his neuroses as luxuries born of wealth and power, citing his preference for being in Europe when he's in New York and vice versa as signs of his "chronic dissatisfaction" and "anhedonia." He acknowledges that his limited musical skills pack halls from London to Venice only because of his movies and thrives on the adoration of European audiences at a time when American ones proved fickle, yet recoils, as in

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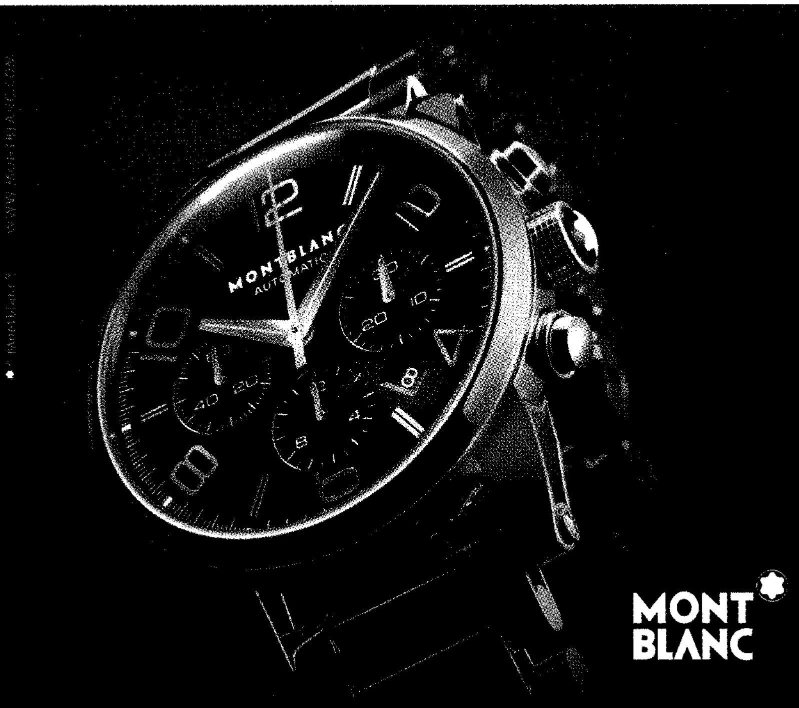

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"Stardust Memories," at the attentions of the overbearing throngs. Putting his public face back on after years of scandal (even introducing his companion at a party as "the notorious Soon-Yi Previn"), Allen comes through the whirlwind lovefest unscathed, perhaps even unaltered. Yet a visit to his parents back home, where his mother reveals the self-imposed isolation of his youth, suggests the high price that his enduring work has exacted from him.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Jan. 2.)

Also Playing

ERAGON: In wide release. **THE HOLIDAY:** In wide release. **INLAND EMPIRE:** IFC Center. **THE NATIVITY STORY:** In wide release. **THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS:** In wide release. **UNACCOMPANIED MINORS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"NewFilmmakers Presents." Dec. 20 at 8: "Raptorious" (2006, Kamal Ahmed). ♦ "The Secret Life of Anthology Film Archives." Dec. 22 at 7: Short-film program.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinema Tropical." Dec. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Hermanas" (2005, Julia Solomonoff; in Spanish). ♦ Special screening. Dec. 21 at 7: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968, Stanley Kubrick), followed by the world-première performance by Rob Lichter and his band of the musical play "Odyssey!"

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Fox Before the Code." Dec. 20 at 1:30, 5:10, and 8:40: "She Learned About Sailors" (1934, George Marshall). ♦ Dec. 20 at 3:30 and 7:10: "She Wanted a Millionaire" (1932, John G. Blystone). ♦ Dec. 21 at 1:20, 4:20, and 8:45: "Three on a Honeymoon" (1934, James Tinling). ♦ Dec. 21 at 2:40 and 5:40: "Dance Team" (1932, Sidney Lanfield). ♦ Dec. 21 at 7:10: "Sailor's Luck" (1933, Raoul Walsh). ♦ In revival. Dec. 20-21 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:30 and 9:40: "Jules and Jim" (1961, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ Dec. 22-28 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 7, and 9:10: "Walkabout" (†). ♦ Through Jan. 11: The films of Woody Allen. Dec. 22-23 at 1:30, 3:25, 5:20, 7:15, and 9:10: "Annie Hall" (1977). ♦ Dec. 24-25 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Play It Again, Sam" (1972, Herbert Ross). ♦ Dec. 24-25 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985). ♦ Dec. 26 at 1:15, 5:15, and 9:15: "Mighty Aphrodite" (1995). ♦ Dec. 26 at 3:10 and 7:10: "Manhattan Murder Mystery" (1993). ♦ Dec. 27 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Love and Death" (1975). ♦ Dec. 27 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask)" (1972). ♦ Dec. 28 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Everyone Says I Love You" (1996). ♦ Dec. 28 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Bullets Over Broadway" (1994). ♦ Dec. 29-30 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Radio Days" (1987). ♦ Dec. 29-30 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Broadway Danny Rose" (1984). ♦ Dec. 31-Jan.1 at 1, 4:35, and 8: "Bananas" (1971). ♦ Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Sleeper" (1973). ♦ Jan. 2 at 1:10, 5:10, and 9:10: "Wild Man Blues" (†). The 9:10 screening will be introduced by the director, Barbara Kopple. ♦ Jan. 2 at 3:15 and 7:15: "Sweet and Lowdown" (1999). The 7:15 screening will be introduced by the jazz musician Vince Giordano.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Dec. 22-25 at noon: "The Seventh Seal" (1957, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Dec. 26-Jan. 1 at noon: "Beauty and the Beast" (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French). ♦ Dec. 29-Jan. 2 (call for showtimes): "Something Wild"(1961, Jack Garfein). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 29-30: "El Topo" (1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—The films of Roberto Rossellini. Except where noted, all films are in Italian. Dec. 20 at 1:30: "Augustine of Hippo" (1972). ♦ Dec. 20 at 6: "Acts of the Apostles" (1968). ♦ Dec. 21 at 1:30: "Socrates" (1970). ♦ Dec. 21 at 6 and Dec. 22 at 1: "The Age of the Medici" (1972). ♦ "Still Moving," films from MOMA's collection. Dec. 20 at 3:45: "The Marriage of Maria Braun" (1978, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ Dec. 21 at 3:45: "How Green Was My Valley" (1941, John Ford). ♦ Films produced by Walter Mirisch. Dec. 20 at 6:15: "The Party" (1968, Blake Edwards). ♦ Dec. 20 at 8:15: "The Pink Panther" (1963, Edwards). ♦ Dec. 22 at 6:15: "Man of the West" (1958, Anthony Mann). ♦ Dec. 22 at 8:15 and Dec. 24 at 5:30: "The Magnificent Seven" (1960, John Sturges). ♦ Dec. 23 at 2 and Dec. 31 at 4: "Wichita" (1955, Jacques Tourneur). ♦ Dec. 23 at 2:15: "The Apartment" (1960, Billy Wilder). ♦ Dec. 23 at 5: "In the Heat of the Night" (1967, Norman Jewison). ♦ Dec. 23 at 7:30 and Dec. 24 at 2:15: "The Great Escape" (1963, Sturges). ♦ Dec. 30 at 3:30 and Dec. 31 at 5:45: "Same Time, Next Year" (1978, Robert Mulligan). ♦ "Made in NY." Dec. 21 at 6 and Dec. 26 at 3:30: "The Projectionist" (1970, Harry Hurwitz). ♦ Dec. 23-24 at noon: "Big" (1988, Penny Marshall). ♦ Films scored by Franz Waxman. Dec. 21 at 7:45: "The Spirit of St. Louis" (1957, Wilder). ♦ Dec. 23 at 4: "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" (1947, Peter Godfrey). ♦ Dec. 23 at 6: "Mr. Skeffington" (1944, Vincent Sherman). ♦ Dec. 24 at 1:30: "The Nun's Story" (1959, Fred Zinnemann). ♦ Dec. 24 at 4:30: "Sunset Blvd." (1950). ♦ Dec. 27 at 6: "Fury" (1936, Fritz Lang). ♦ Dec. 27 at 8: "The Furies" (1950, Mann). ♦ Dec. 29 at 8:30: "Sayonara" (1957, Joshua Logan). ♦ Dec. 31 at 2: "Rebecca" (1940, Alfred Hitchcock), introduced by the writer Jack Sullivan. ♦ Dec. 31: "Old Acquaintance" (1943, Vincent Sherman). ♦ The films of Thomas Ince. All films are silent. Dec. 22 at 6: Program 5. ♦ Dec. 22 at 8: Program 6. ♦ Dec. 28 at 2: Program 3. ♦ Dec. 28 at 4: Program 4. ♦ Holiday movies. Dec. 26 at 11 A.M. and 1:30: "The Adventures of Robin Hood" (1938, Michael Curtiz and William Keighley). ♦ Dec. 27 at 11 A.M. and 1:30: "Shrek" (2001, Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson). ♦ Dec. 28 at 11 A.M. and 1:30: "Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" (2005, Nick Park and Steve Box). ♦ Dec. 29 at noon and 2: "Babe" (1995, Chris Noonan). ♦ Dec. 30 at 11 A.M. and 1:30: "Madagascar" (2005, Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath). ♦ Dec. 31 at 11 A.M. and 1:30: "Ghostbusters" (1984, Ivan Reitman). ♦ Jan. 1 at 11 A.M. and 2: "Mr. Bug Goes to Town" (1942, Dave Fleischer). ♦ Jan. 2 at 11 A.M. and 2: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ The films of Paolo Virzi. All films are in Italian. Dec. 27 at 6: "Kisses and Hugs" (1998). ♦ Dec. 27 at 8: "August Vacation" (1996). ♦ Dec. 28 at 8: "Living It Up" (1994). ♦ Dec. 29 at 6: "My Name Is Tanino" (2001). ♦ Dec. 30 at 7: "Hardboiled Egg" (1997). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." All films are in French. Dec. 28 at 6:30 and Dec. 30 at 2: "Maine-Ocean Express" (†). ♦ Dec. 29 at 6:30 and Dec. 30 at 5: "La Vie des Morts" (1991, Arnaud Desplechin) and "Tous à la Manif" (1994, Laurent Cantet).

"Night at the Museum," starring Ben Stiller as a hapless watchman, opens Dec. 22.

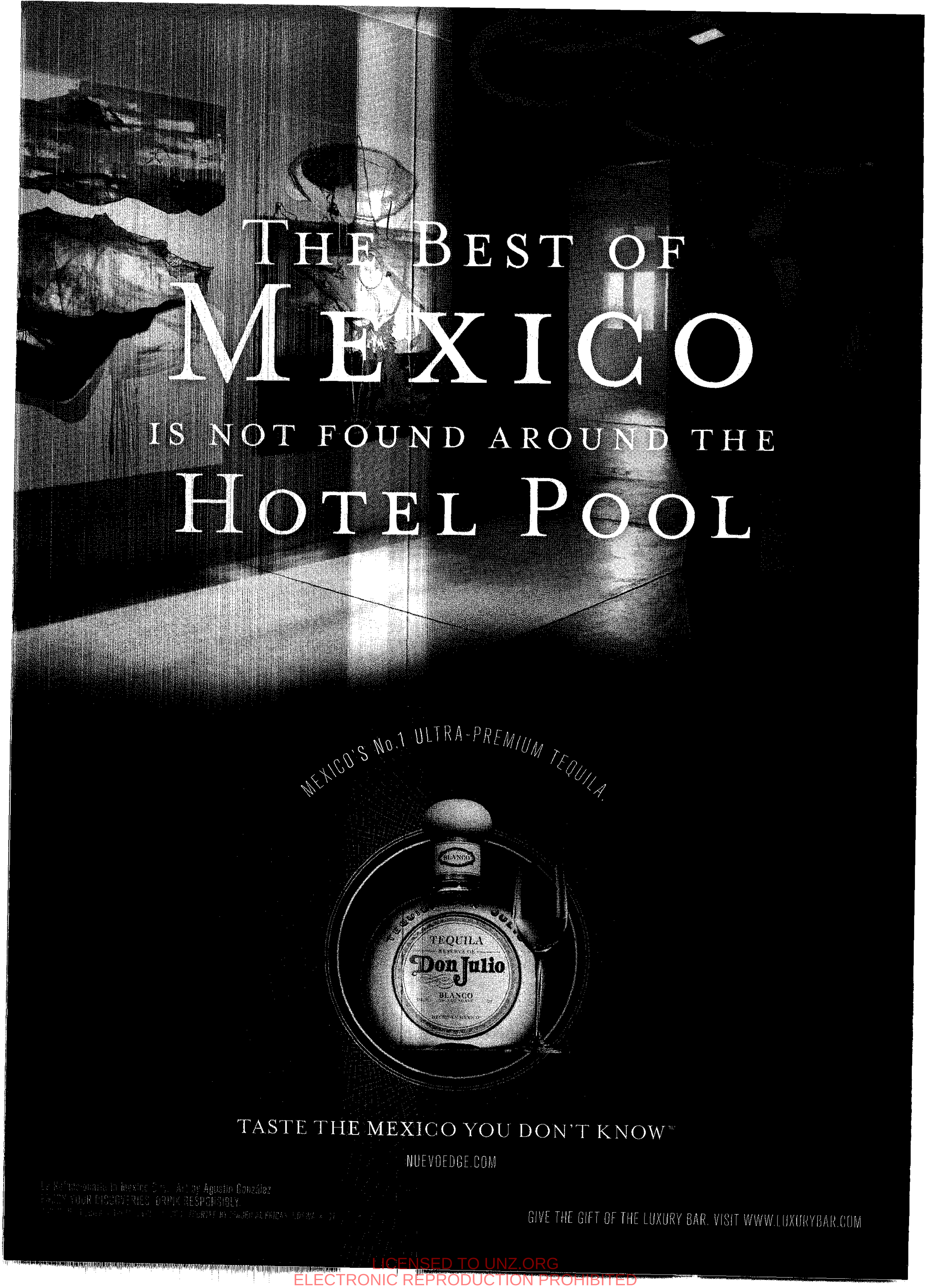
MAREK COLEK

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Jacques Rivette. All films are in French. Dec. 22 at 7:30: "Divertimento" (1991). ♦ Dec. 23 at 2: "Secret Defense" (1998). ♦ Dec. 23 at 6 and Dec. 29 at 7:30: "The Story of Marie and Julien" (2003). ♦ Dec. 24 at 2: "The Gang of Four" (1989). ♦ Dec. 30 at 6 and Dec. 31 at 5: "Va Savoir" (2001). ♦ In revival. Dec. 26-Jan. 1 at 1:30: "Oliver!" (1968, Carol Reed).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Dec. 20-24, Dec. 26, Dec. 28-29, and Dec. 31 at 9: "Automatons" (2006, James Felix McKenney). ♦ In revival. Dec. 20 at 7: "Climates" (2006, Nuri Bilge Ceylan; in Turkish). ♦ Dec. 21 at 7: "Bell, Book and Candle" (1958, Richard Quine). ♦ Dec. 23 at 10:45; "Silent Night, Deadly Night" (1984, Charles E. Sellier, Jr.). ♦ Dec. 25 at 4: "Cabaret" (1972, Bob Fosse). ♦ Dec. 26 at 7: "Christmas Evil" (1980, Lewis Jackson), introduced by the director. ♦ Dec. 29 at 7: "Shockproof" (1949, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Dec. 30-31 at 7: "Rock Around the Clock" (1956, Fred F. Sears).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Dec. 22 at 9:30: "The Sign of the Cross" (1932, Cecil B. DeMille). ♦ Dec. 29 at 7: "Odds Against Tomorrow" (1959, Robert Wise).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Dec. 22-23: "The Dark Crystal" (1982, Jim Henson and Frank Oz). ♦ Dec. 29-30: "This Is Spinal Tap" (1984, Rob Reiner).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THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. Dec. 23 at 11 A.M. and 2: "Babes in Toyland" (1961, Jack Donohue). ♦ Dec. 24, Dec. 26, and Dec. 31 at 4:30: "Dersu Uzala" (1975, Akira Kurosawa; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 30 at 11 A.M. and 2: "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" (1971, Mel Stuart). ♦ Dec. 31 and Jan. 2 at 5: Six short silent films by Charlie Chaplin, including "The Immigrant" (1917).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 20 at 2 and 6:10: "Round Two" (2005, Daniel Cebrián). ♦ Dec. 20 at 4:15 and 8:15: "7 Virgins" (2004, Alberto Rodriguez). ♦ Dec. 21 at 1:30 and Dec. 23 at 1: "Salvador" (2006, Manuel Huerga). ♦ Dec. 21 at 4 and 9, Dec. 23 at 5:45, and Dec. 24 at 1: "Out of Here" (2006, Víctor García León). ♦ Dec. 21 at 6:15: "Quixotic" (2006, Albert Serra). ♦ Dec. 22 at 2 and 6:15 and Dec. 23 at 8: "Lola" (2006, Javier Rebollo). ♦ Dec. 22 at 4:15 and 8:30 and Dec. 24 at 5:15: "The Magicians" (2005, Esteban Riambau and Elisabet Cabeza). ♦ Dec. 23 at 3:40: "The Crime on Bordadores Street" (1946, Edgar Neville). ♦ Dec. 24 at 3 and Dec. 26 at 1 and 8:45: "Flamenco" (1952, Neville) and "Verbena" (1941, Neville). ♦ Dec. 26 at 3:10 and 6:40: "The Last Horse" (1950, Neville). ♦ Dec. 26 at 5: "Carnival Sunday" (1945, Neville). ♦ The films of Pedro Almodóvar. All films are in Spanish. Dec. 27 at 1:45 and 6:15 and Dec. 28 at 4 and 8:30: "Matador" (1986). ♦ Dec. 27 at 4 and 8:30 and Dec. 28 at 1:45 and 6:15: "Law of Desire" (1987). ♦ Dec. 29 at 2:15 and 6:30 and Dec. 30 at 4:45 and 9: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988). ♦ Dec. 29 at 4:15 and 8:30 and Dec. 30 at 2:30 and 6:45: "The Flower of My Secret" (1995). ♦ Dec. 31 at 1, Jan. 1 at 8:30, and Jan. 2 at 2: "Live Flesh" (1997). ♦ Dec. 31 at 3:15 and 7:15, Jan. 1 at 6:30, and Jan. 2 at 4:15: "All About My Mother" (1999). ♦ Jan. 1 at 2 and Jan. 2 at 6:30: "Talk to Her" (2002). ♦ Jan. 1 at 4:15 and Jan. 2 at 8:45: "Bad Education" (2004).

READINGS AND TALKS

"FANTASTIC FICTION"
Brian Evenson, Justin Courter, and Ira Sher gather for an evening of science-fiction stories. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 20 at 7.)

"IN THE FLESH"
The erotic-literature reading series at the Happy Ending Lounge, allegedly a former massage parlor, in Chinatown, continues on Dec. 20 at 8, with the writers Abiola Abrams, L. Elise Bland, Scott Bowen, Stan Kent, Lisa Beth Kovetz, Karen Moulding, and Jean Roberta. The series' founder and host, the columnist Rachel Kramer Bussel, will be on hand, as will the illustrator Molly Crabapple, who will distribute crayons and pages from her recently published, suitably themed "Dr. Sketchy's Official Rainy Day Colouring Book." Cupcakes, candy canes, and other goodies will also be served. (302 Broome St., at Forsyth St. No tickets necessary.)

THE POETRY PROJECT
The Project's annual New Year's Day Marathon reading features scores of downtown personalities, including Edwin Torres, Todd Colby, John S. Hall, Patti Smith, Taylor Mead, Bob Holman, and Tracie Morris. Jan. 1, starting at 2. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BRONX ZOO'S HOLIDAY LIGHTS
More than a hundred and fifty animal sculptures, including pink flamingos, frogs, and monkeys, are aglow at the Bronx Zoo. Each night there are ice-sculpture demonstrations, storytelling, and live reindeer. (Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd. 718-367-1010. Nightly until Jan. 1 except Dec. 24-25. The display concludes Jan. 5-7.)

NEW YORK NATIONAL BOAT SHOW
The annual display known to inspire dreams of escape, adventure, and, at the very least, warmer weather gets under way on Dec. 30 and runs through Jan. 7. (Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, Eleventh Ave. between 34th and 39th Sts. For more information, call 212-984-7000.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Train-lovers have their day at **Christie's** (Dec. 20), with a sale that includes photographs, vintage posters, and, of course, a vast selection of scale models, including one of the Commodore Vanderbilt, the first streamlined locomotive in America. The house then eases into the holidays with one of its occasional House Sales, auctions of moderately priced furnishings and decorations (Dec. 20-21). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** closes out the year with an auction of posters in the Art Nouveau style (Dec. 20), featuring a series of works by the fin-de-siècle Czech illustrator Alphonse Mucha—who created publicity posters for the grand Sarah Bernhardt—as well as a multitude of sunny images of bicycles. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

Japanese contemporary dance, at the Joyce.

JOHN RITTER

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
ARTFUL ART
Jan. 10

A baffling minimalist painting was the focal point of Yasmina Reza's 1994 comedy "Art." Her new work, "A Spanish Play," is set at a theatre rehearsal. John Turturro directs a cast that includes Zoe Caldwell and Denis O'Hare. (212-352-3101.)

MOVIES
DIASPORA AND ZION
Jan. 10-25

The 2007 edition of the New York Jewish Film Festival, at the Walter Reade Theatre, offers such recent documentaries as "Toots," a portrait of Toots Shor by his granddaughter, and "The Rape of Europa," about the plunder of Jewish-owned art during the Second World War, as well as fictions, including "Our Children," from 1948, the last Yiddish feature made in Poland. (212-875-5600.)

DANCE
EAST MEETS WEST
Jan. 16-21

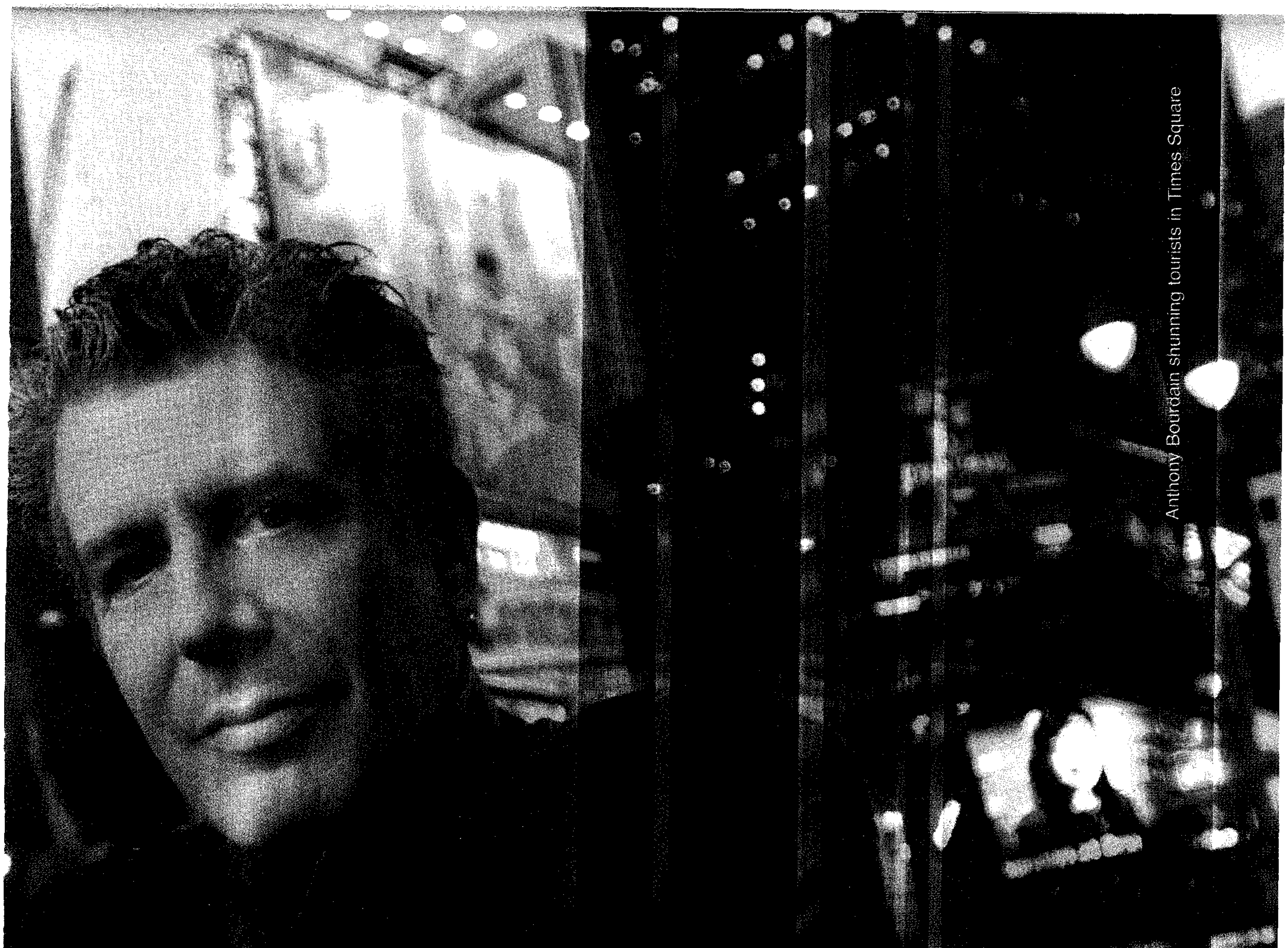
The Japan Society presents its tenth annual Japanese Contemporary Dance Showcase, with two mixed bills of cutting-edge choreography at the Joyce. The anniversary programs include Hiroshi Koike's dance-theatre ensemble Pappa Tarahumara and the multimedia compositions of Leni-Basso. (212-242-0800.)

ART
ASIANPUNKBOY
Jan. 19-May 31

He's not yet thirty, but Terence Koh has already made a big impression with witty and aggressive art works like a large neon outline of a rooster titled "Big White Cock," gothic assemblages of black-painted junk, and zines he made under the name asianpunkboy. For his solo museum début in the U.S., he'll be making a large-scale installation in the Whitney's lobby. (800-944-8639.)

NIGHT LIFE
AGAINST THE YEARS
Jan. 25

The Detroit rocker Bob Seger has returned with a new studio album, "Face the Promise," and a show at Madison Square Garden. Expect to hear plenty of old hits, including "Night Moves" and "Katmandu." (212-307-7171.)



Anthony Bourdain shunning tourists in Times Square

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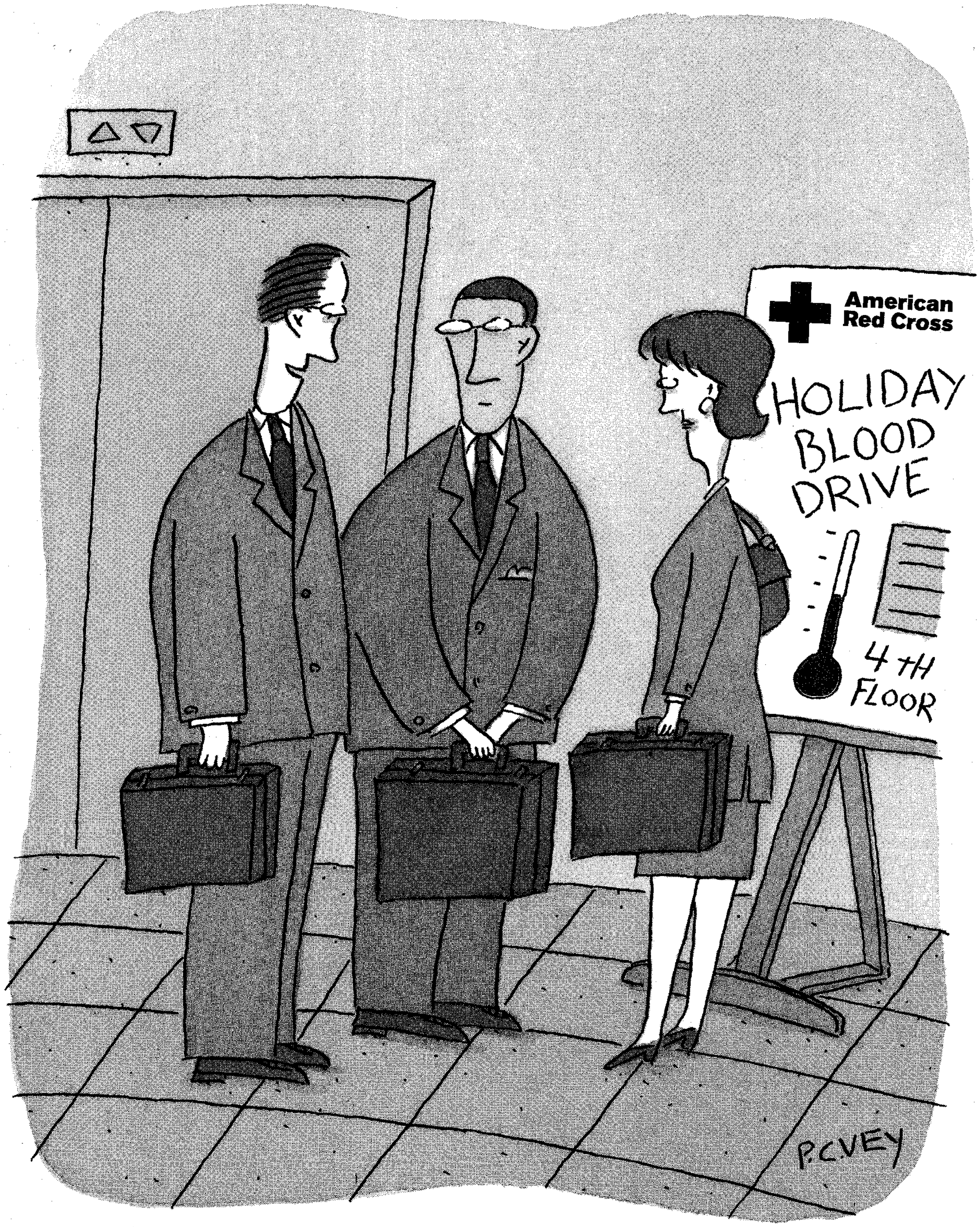
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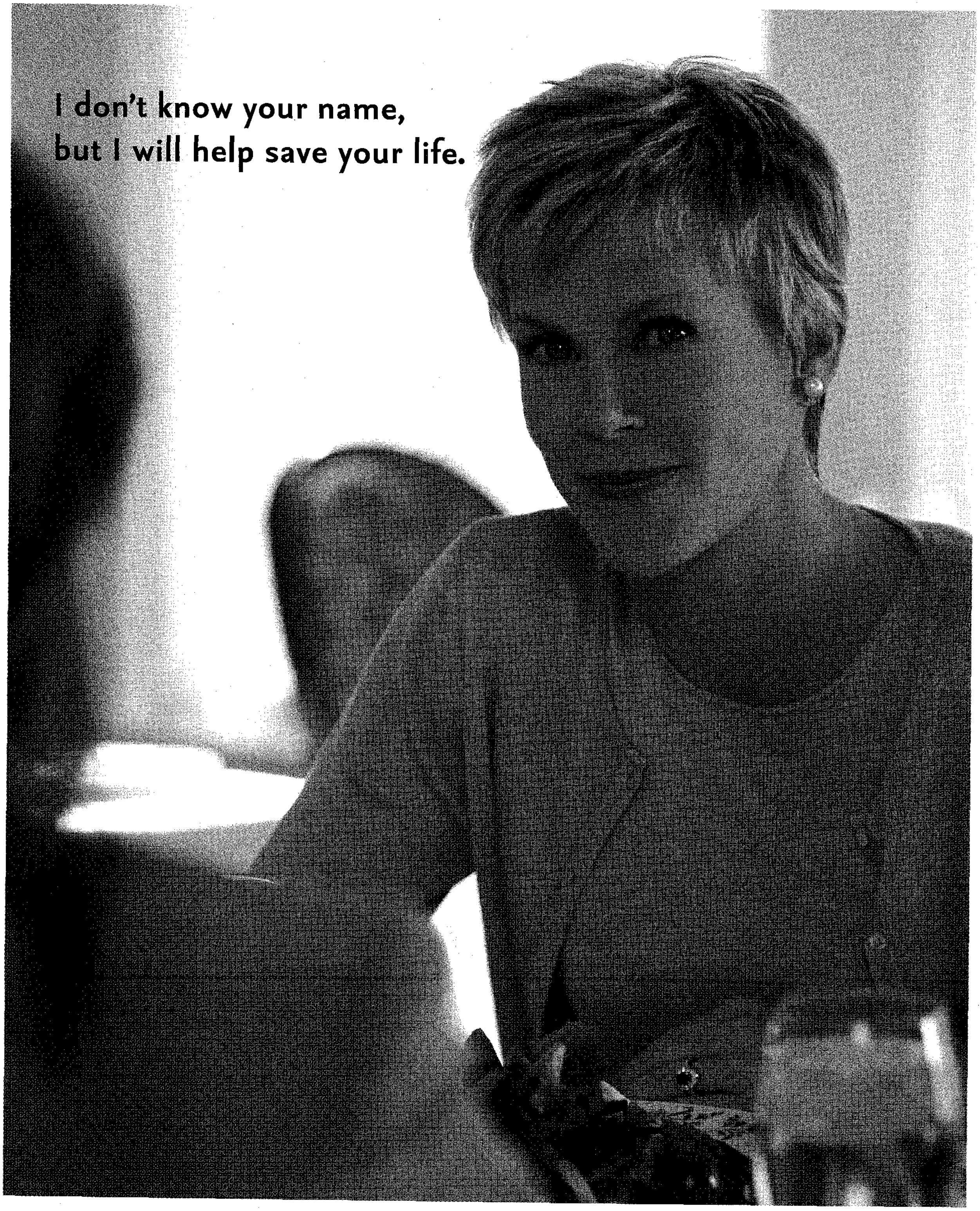
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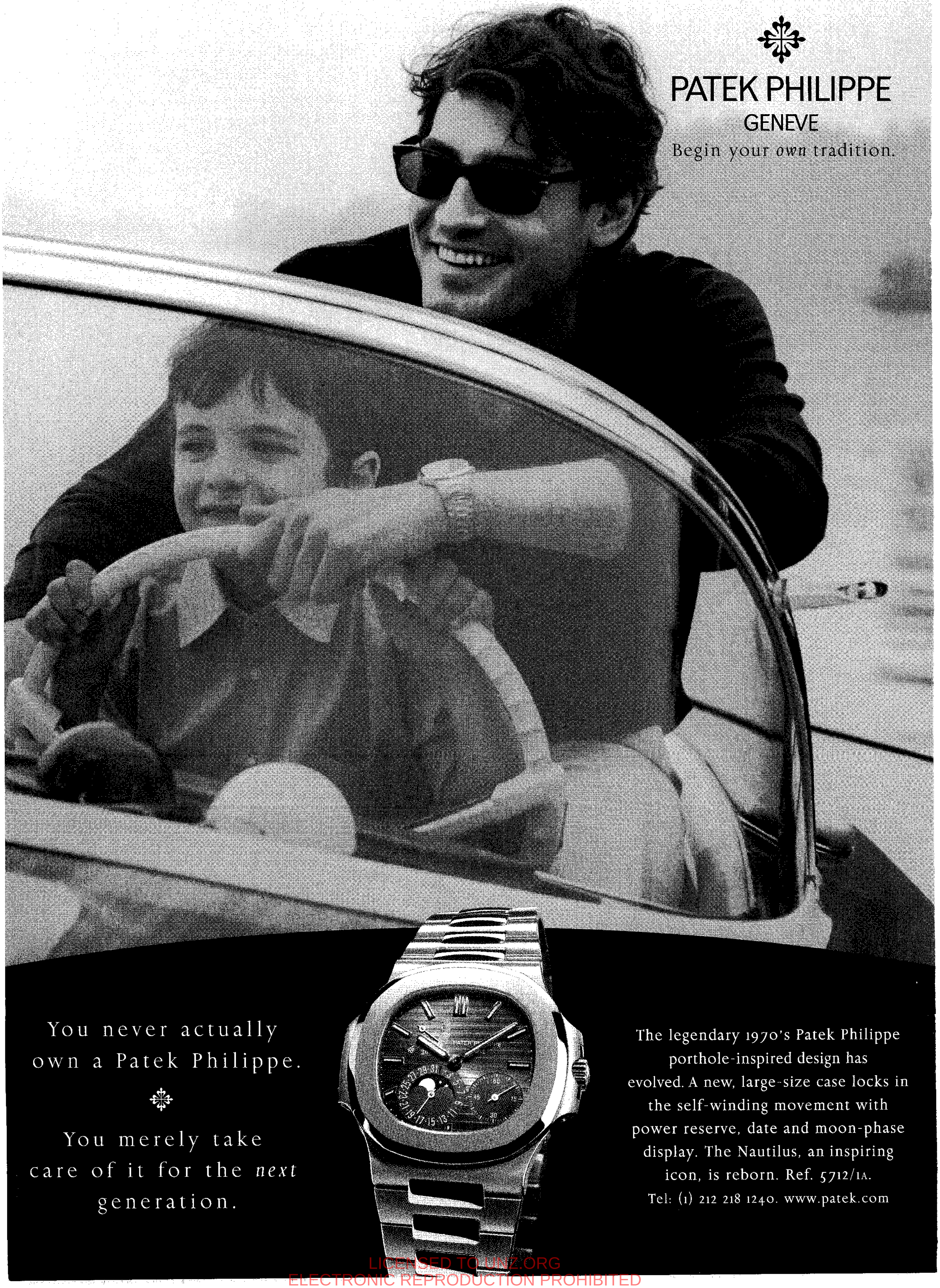

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HIS WAY

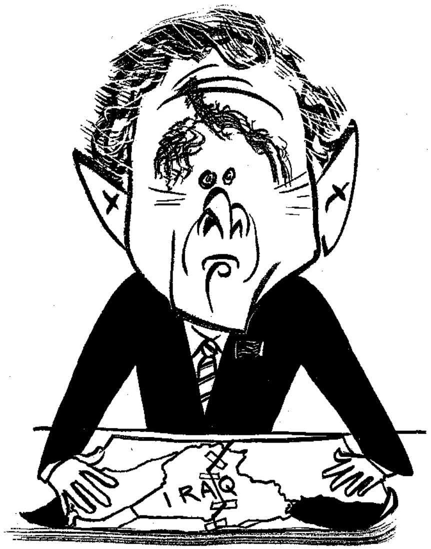
All we wanted for Christmas was a plausible Iraq strategy. In the White House briefing room last week, George Bush's spokesman, Tony Snow, explained why this was unrealistic. The President, he said, "is moving toward a decision on how to move forward." In a tone of voice that was not particularly seasonal, he continued:

> I know a lot of you have been curious about when he would be announcing or talking about the way forward. That is not going to happen until the new year. We do not know when, so I can't give you a date, I can't give you a time, I can't give you a place, I can't give you the way in which it will happen.

According to the latest polls, seven out of ten Americans disapprove of Bush's performance regarding Iraq. For them, Snow offered a few words of reassurance. "The most important thing," he said, "is that the President continues to be engaged in the business of talking about the way forward."

The resignation of Donald Rumsfeld as Defense Secretary has produced a chaos in Washington's Iraq-policy debate akin to that which sometimes follows the sudden fall of a dictator. (As Rumsfeld once said about Iraq's looters, "Free people are free to make mistakes.") With his brio and his bullying, Rumsfeld suppressed discussion of alternative courses in Iraq advocated by the uniformed military; he fought opponents in the Cabinet, among them Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and, before her, Colin Powell, to a stalemate; and he encouraged President Bush's combination of rhetorical bravado and persistent denial of Iraq's deteriorating condition. The Administration that Rumsfeld has left behind looks a little untidy, as he might have put it.

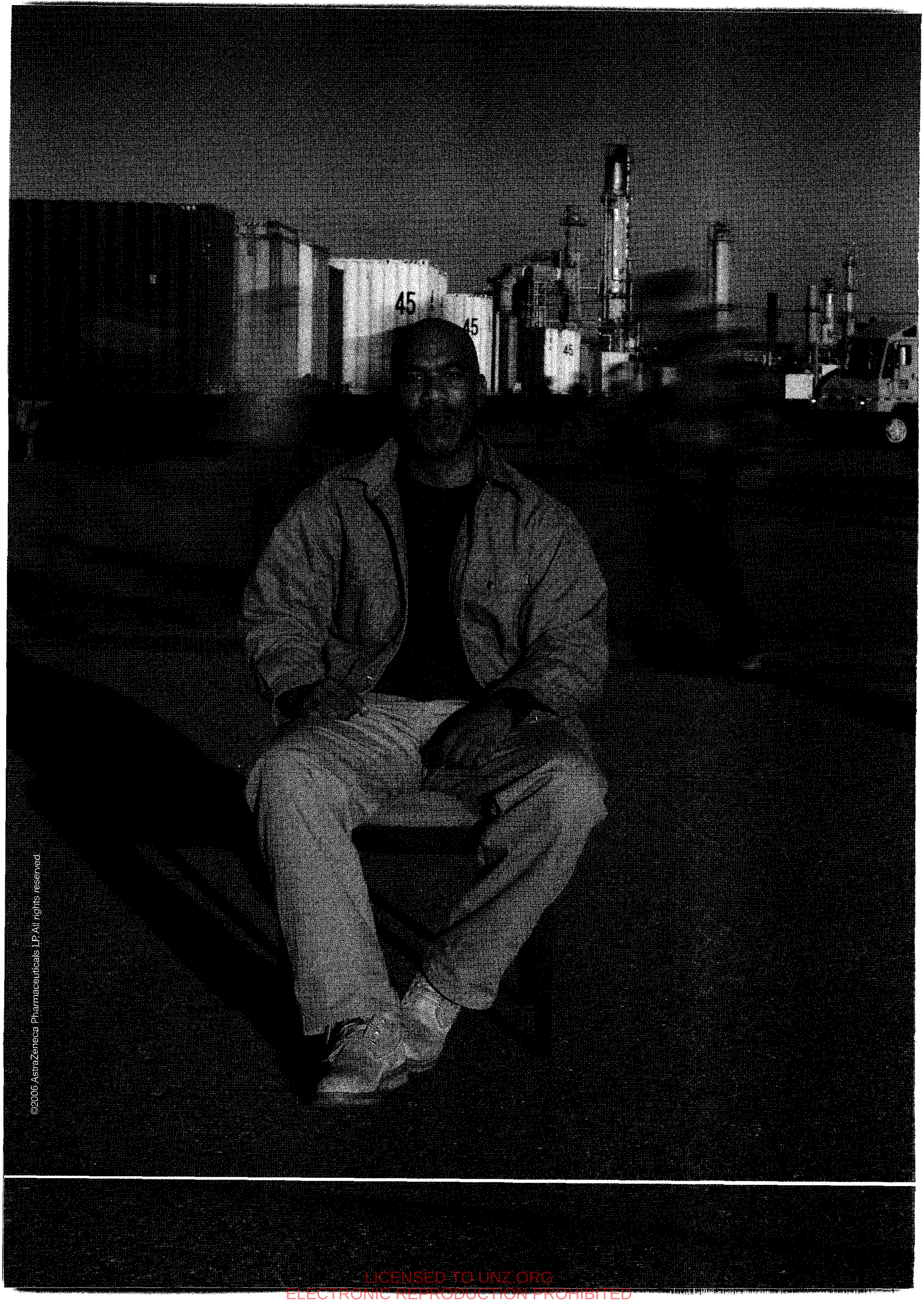
In the wishful imagining of many Washington wonks, both Democratic and Republican, Rumsfeld's departure, coupled with the publication of a comprehensive policy review by the grand old bipartisan Pooh-Bahs of the Iraq Study Group, would by now have produced a realistic and pragmatic plan, publicly anointed by Bush. This plan would have featured an ambitious diplomatic campaign, including talks with Syria and possibly Iran, aimed at stabilizing Iraq gradually, which in turn might help set conditions for a managed American exit from daily combat in Iraqi cities and villages; the exact timetables and methods of this troop redeployment and withdrawal would be determined later.



The President, however, has little interest in or talent for the energetic global diplomacy recommended by the Iraq Study Group, which was co-chaired by James Baker, who was Secretary of State under Bush's father. Bush the younger is plainly annoyed by the commission's forceful, vivid account of his failures in Iraq. He seems to have interpreted the report as one more lousy shot at him from the has-beens and second-guessers who shaped his father's notably more successful foreign policy. If the President had embraced the Study Group's critique of Iraq's dire condition as true and helpful, of course, he would have had to admit that he was wrong about the invasion and the occupation, and that his father's crowd was right.

Bush has now immersed himself in his own Iraq review, one that will allow him to claim the credit for any shift in direction, but this effort has become transparently unconvincing. He gives the impression of a man wandering around Washington looking for a new mentor. The practical-minded intelli-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



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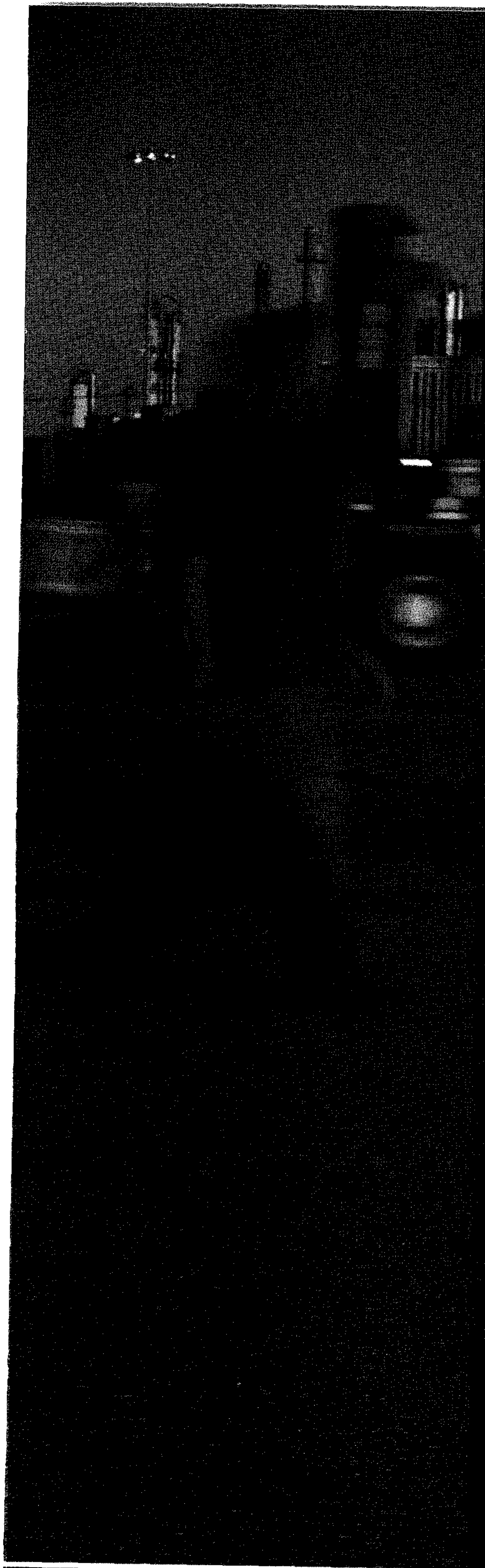

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ON DUTY
VEYAT

"I'm going to need to make multiple stops."

• •

gence analyst he appointed as Rumsfeld's successor, Robert Gates, who is another friend of his father's, has already declared that "there are no new ideas on Iraq," yet the President has spent December in sleeves-rolled-up discussions with State Department experts and military officers, apparently searching for such ideas. It seems a little late in his chief-executive-style Presidency for such an earnest return to graduate school. Worse, he remains imprisoned by his binary vision and rhetoric. When he emerged from one Iraq cram session, a reporter asked if he had heard any encouraging new plans. The President could only think to say, "I've heard some ideas that would lead to defeat. And I reject those ideas."

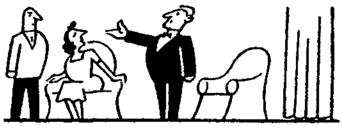
In fact, the choices that Bush faces are not as complex or as diverse as the Study Group's seventy-nine elegantly printed italicized recommendations might imply. The opportunities for decisive American action in Iraq drained away some time ago. Managing catastrophic failure so as to minimize its harmful effects is not glamorous or emotionally rewarding work, but that is all Bush and his advisers have available in Iraq.

In part because he lost control of Congress in November, Bush will be hard pressed to defy the Study Group's bipartisan consensus, and so a rough outline of what will come next is already clear. Iraq's constitutional, elected government will continue to receive American financial and military support—as it should, given that an American invasion created the conditions in which it suffers. A civil war between Shiites and Sunnis will continue to claim thousands of Iraqi lives, while the United States and some of its allies attempt, with uncertain prospects, to contain that war within Iraq's borders. American troops will gradually be withdrawn, but tens of thousands will remain in Iraq at least until the 2008 election. American casualties may start to decline before then, but, as the next Presidential campaign takes shape, American politics and society will nonetheless remain sundered by a version of the question that Senator John Kerry, who lost to Bush in the last Presidential campaign, asked thirty-five years ago: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

The arrogance and the incompetence that brought the United States to this moment in Iraq cannot release it from the obligations and the interests, some of indefinite duration, that require its persistence there. Much of this work is defensive in character, such as managing Kurdish autonomy to prevent a wider regional war, stopping the formation of an Al Qaeda mini-state in Anbar province, and challenging Iran's clandestine warfare. Then, too, there remains a moral obligation to attempt to protect from mass violence and ethnic cleansing the majority of Iraqi civilians, who still participate peacefully in the constitutional system established by preëmptive American force. The record of the past three years makes clear, however, that none of these goals can be achieved through a prolonged occupation carried out by a hundred thousand or more American combat troops. The President remains a long way from seeing this, and so the troops remain a long way from coming home.

—*Steve Coll*

MOSCOW POSTCARD
BRITISH IMPORT



Life is short, art long, and Russian art longer. Or so it seems. A couple of weeks ago, the Czech-born, Britain-residing, world-conquering playwright Tom Stoppard left behind a stack of largely rave reviews for the New York production of "Voyage," the first part of a trilogy called "The Coast of Utopia," about the pioneering Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, and set out for Moscow to look in on rehearsals for the play there. It would be unfair to say that the Russian production is coming along at the pace of a Five-Year Plan, but, as Stoppard took time out from rehearsals at the Moscow Academic Youth Theatre, he could not help being gently surprised at the meandering, Chekhovian pace of things.

"A few weeks ago, I received the impression that 'The Coast of Utopia' might open in Moscow next April," he said over tea and cookies one afternoon in a book-crammed back office at the theatre. "The American actors were quite amused by the idea that one may begin rehearsing a play with a view to opening it possibly fifteen months later. Now I have to tell them that it will not be fifteen months—it probably will be twenty months!" He went on, "I am genuinely bemused and charmed by the absence of pressure on the artists here. In London, we rehearsed for twelve weeks, and all three plays were suddenly onstage."

Stoppard has had plays performed in Russia before, but he had particularly

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Chopin
POTATO VODKA
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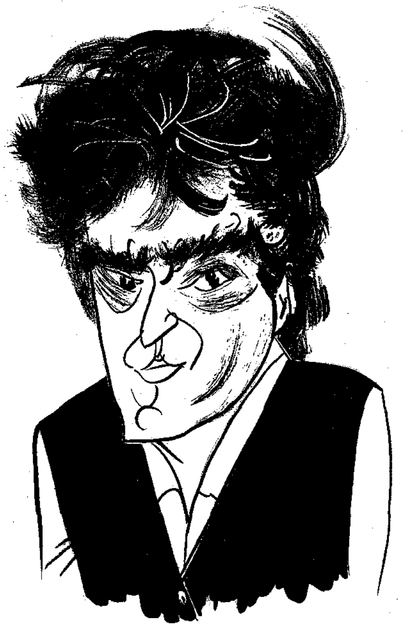
hoped, while writing "The Coast of Utopia," which is populated by Alexander Herzen, Vissarion Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin, and Nicholas Ogarev, among others, that this one might be produced there. And yet when he first sent the script to a company in St. Petersburg, Stoppard said, he "discovered something that was a big surprise to me. There was resistance to the idea of Russians going into the theatre to get more Herzen and Belinsky. They were sick of having Herzen and Belinsky shoved down their throats in high school."


Tom Stoppard

Herzen was lionized during the Communist era as an ideological forerunner of the Bolsheviks. The Soviets named streets, libraries, and colleges after him, along with Bakunin and Belinsky. Every Soviet kid had to study Belinsky's articles about Russian literature. Every college student had to memorize Lenin's three-part formulation of the revolutionary movement: the Decembrists came first, but they were distant from the people; the Decembrists awakened Herzen; and Herzen unleashed "revolutionary agitation." It took Lenin and the Bolsheviks, of course, to finally put Russia on its path. Over time, though, Herzen, like every Soviet propaganda icon, became the butt of anti-Soviet jokes. One dissident poet wrote, "The Decembrists woke up Herzen. He underslept. That's how it all started."

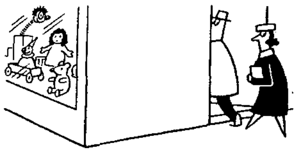
"The Coast of Utopia" is steeped in the Russian intellectual debates of the nineteenth century, and it contains countless hidden quotes from documents of the time, but Stoppard doesn't want it to be regarded as merely a historical piece. "It's a play that was inspired by my liking for Russian theatre as much as it was by my interest in Russian radicalism," he said. "I'm like any decent playwright—we all want to write our own Chekhov play. We never succeed."

In today's Russia, the play is more likely to be read as a return to the eternal conversation about Russia's relationship to the West. Stoppard sounded puzzled as he recalled a recent press conference in Moscow. "It ended up as a seminar about the philosophy of Herzen and Ogarev," he said. In "Shipwreck," the second part of the trilogy, one character argues for development "in a Russian way . . . with our own culture unpolluted by the Renaissance." Herzen responds, "Russia before Peter had no culture. Life was ugly, poor and savage. . . . The light is over there. West." Fifteen years after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., Russian intellectuals continue the quest for identity. While the Gorbachev and early Yeltsin period was characterized by admiration for Western values, the Putin era increasingly represents a turning away, another search for a "Russian way."

At a book-signing later in the week, some of Stoppard's admirers, Westernizers all, spoke of him as a prophet who somehow had answers to Russia's problems. "Only Tom," one of them said, "could bring these emigrants, these thinkers, back to the Russian soil."

—*Masha Lipman*

DEPT. OF TOYLAND SECURITY
CHECKING IT TWICE

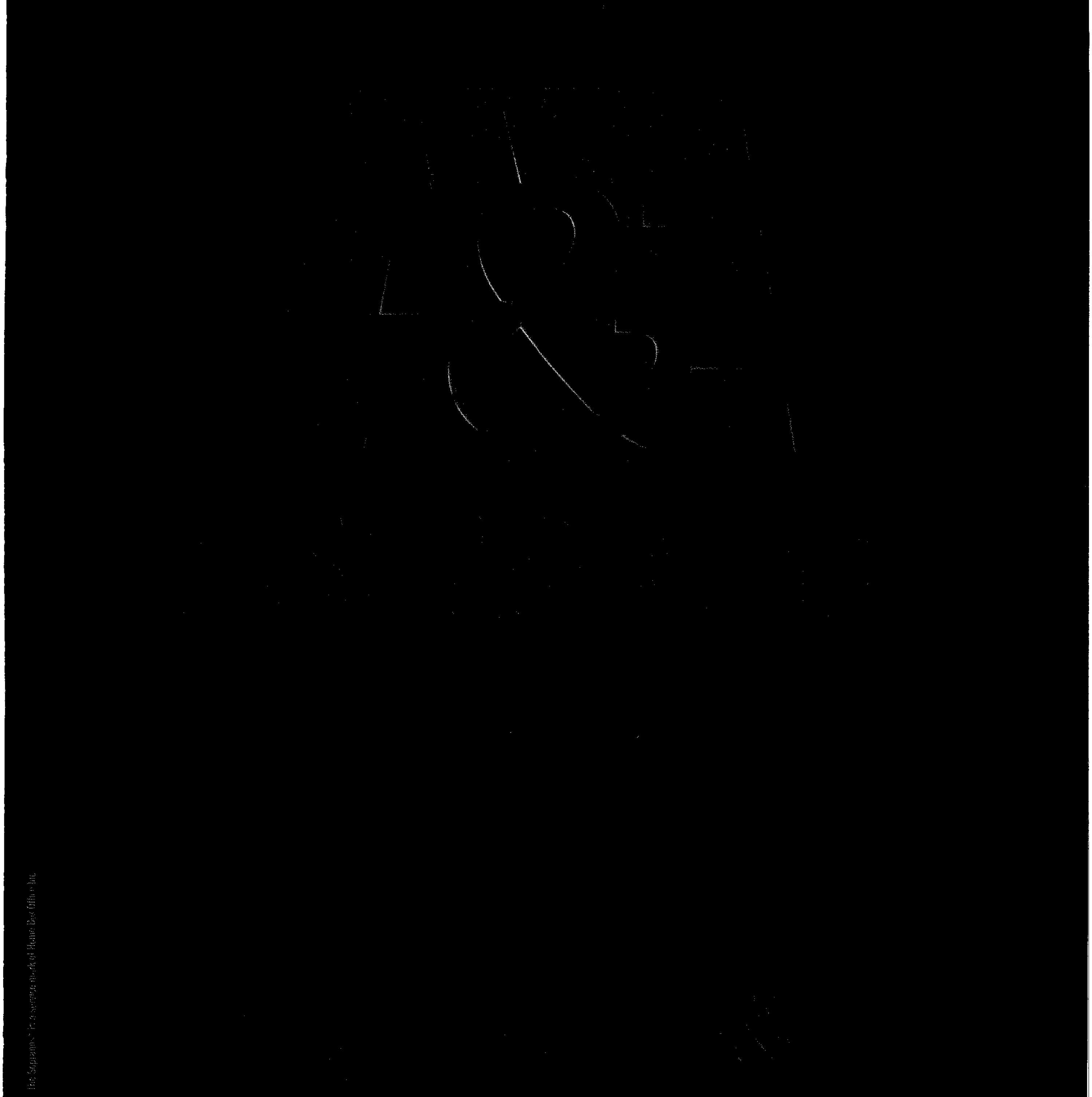


Anyone wondering whether daily life in New York is getting more like passing through airport security (bag checks on the subway, getting "wanded" at the theatre) had only to stop by F.A.O. Schwarz this holiday season to know for sure. An announcement on the store's Web site explained some new rules. For the month of December, Mondays would be called Five-Borough Mondays; from 7:30 to 9 A.M., card-carrying New Yorkers, with valid proof of residency, could have first crack at the freshly laid-out Thomas the Tank Engine sets and the build-a-doll stations. The store's other geopolitical constituents, non-U.S. citizens and U.S. nationals from cities outside New York, would have their own days—International Tuesdays and U.S. Wednesdays, respectively—to shop among their own kind. "We have strict rules," the Web site said. "So don't show up on the wrong day. We hate to turn people away, but we will."

Ed Schmults, F.A.O. Schwarz's C.E.O., said that the plan came to him after a British shopper showed him a page in her guidebook warning visitors to avoid the store during the Christmas season. (On this point, travel guides seem to be in agreement. From the Zagat shopping survey: " 'Don't go over the holidays' 'when it's a zoo' and 'tourists move like snails.' ") Early opening hours would be a good way to thin the crowds, Schmults thought, and segregating the shoppers by place of origin would be "just kind of fun."

On a recent Monday morning, admission was being granted at the store's side entrance on Fifty-eighth Street, where a glass vestibule, manned by one of the store's toy soldiers, served as a passport-control office. "Good morning," the toy soldier/immigration official said. "You look like a New Yorker." He said that he had already denied entry to a French couple. "We informed them that their day is tomorrow. I told them to go get some breakfast." Between seven-thirty and nine, about twenty shoppers made it through the soldier's screening process—"Welcome to F.A.O. Schwarz! Are you from New York?" Then they lined up to present their identification documents to a large security guard with a walkie-talkie. Among those who passed inspection: a Morgan Stanley executive in search of a panda bear; a mom with two children and a young woman she introduced as her "child-care professional"; and a woman who had come up from SoHo with her six-month-old daughter. "I never shop above Fourteenth Street," she said, "but we're making her nursery into a jungle safari, so we came to get a zebra. We already have the giraffe and the hairy sheep."

The next morning, International Tuesday, things were quieter. "I think it's a little early for our international shop-



WEDNESDAYS 9PM/8C PREMIERES JANUARY 10

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pers," Nanette Difalco, the store's director of P.R., said. "They stay up late." The temperature had dropped significantly, and the toy soldier, who is a music student, passed the time by singing "Ain't Too Proud to Beg." At seven-forty, a Spanish couple arrived, wearing dark ski jackets, passports in hand. They said they knew the rules, internationals only—"We read about it on the Web page"—and, after being waved in, they made a beeline for the collectible Barbies. At eight, a couple with wind-chapped cheeks hesitated outside.

"Are you guys coming in?" the toy soldier asked. No response. "Are you international? Yes? Come inside!" They entered the vestibule, where the security guard intercepted them: "Do you have passports?" They did not. "What do we need a passport for?" the man asked.

"Hang on a second," the guard said. He dashed away, leaving the pair in front of a sign explaining the holiday hours. "Look!" the man said, pointing to the sign. "We're on perfect timing." The guard returned: "O.K., do you have a driver's license?" They did: from Scotland. In they went.

As nine o'clock approached, the toy soldier admitted an Irish couple ("Want to see my beautiful passport photo?") and rejected the next patron, a man from Westchester. He was wearing a tan bomber jacket; he said he had been looking for a warm place to have a cup of coffee. "That guy just asked me if I was with the international something or other," he said, jerking his chin toward the toy soldier. "When I said no, he said, 'Well, we're not open till nine.' " Behind him, through the window, the Scottish couple could be seen enjoying coffee and croissants in the F.A.O. Schwarz café.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

SIGN ME UP DEPT.
JOINER

In 1998, a local man, aged forty, requested a legal name change for reasons that he no longer cares to explain. Out with the old ("and you're not going to find out what it was," he said recently), and in with—say it slowly—Leftonred Atanycorner. The new name suits his politics (he goes by Lefty) and hints at his rebellious streak. Other names he considered include Fail2yield Atalltimes and X. Sesivspeed.

Lefty is a freelance computer consultant and a world-class networker and social joiner. He belongs to more than four hundred clubs, and has supervised or organized twenty-six of them, including one whose theme was administrating more clubs. "I was the organizer of the organizers' group," he says. For a while, he kept a blog, Where's Lefty, "a 'Where's Waldo' for the modern socialista," in which he chronicled his schmoozy travels. (Sample entry: "Eric was a great host and offered us free Jello Shots before the movie and pizza during the movie. Way to go Eric!") Then he concluded that he was too busy meeting and greeting to record his impressions in a timely fashion, and he gave up.

Most of Lefty's group activities are coördinated through the Web site Meetup.com, where, for instance, origami aficionados or "Twin Peaks" fans or atheists (Lefty is all three) can find like-minded souls and arrange to convene. There are about ten New Yorkers—the Meetup Mafia, they call themselves—whose convening enthusiasm transcends subject matter. They are "high-volume attendees," as Lefty says, and Lefty is their don.

The other day, during a coffee break at a graphic-design seminar on lower Broadway, Lefty, who was wearing a pin-striped suit and an orange shirt, half unbuttoned, reached into his right jacket pocket and produced a stack of cards. "That's my business card," he said, presenting one for inspection. It read, "Middle Earth Media: We'll bury your problems," and featured an image of a hobbit with a shovel. (Lefty, a Tolkien fanatic, is by no means tall.) "Here's a *sake* card." It promised "an exciting and unpretentious atmosphere" and listed the Web site for the New York Sake Meetup Group. "And this one's a personal card." It featured a head shot and cited his blog. His left jacket pocket contained fifteen more cards: bounty from the morning's small-business owners' breakfast.

His next stop was N.Y.U.'s Hayden Hall, for a monthly vegan dinner, where he ran into his old friends Gary, Doug, and Andrea. An Indian man, spotting the middle-aged cluster among the mostly college-aged crowd, approached them cautiously. "Is this Meetup?" he asked.

"If you see Lefty, it's Meetup," Gary said.

Andrea critiqued the food—"The Kiev is excellent, and the stuffed shell sucks." Then she added, "I'm going to a mystery Meetup after this."

Lefty, for his part, wanted to drop by a *sake* tasting on Astor Place ("If there's a *sake* tasting in the New York area, Lefty's got to be there"), before heading to a meeting of the Personal Computer Users Group, of which he is the president.

The computing event ran long—a sales representative was showing off new digital cameras—and a weary traveller, shadowing Lefty for a day, began to dream of the next item on the itinerary: Beer Meetup. But it was three hours past the scheduled start of Beer Meetup before they arrived at the specified bar. Lefty approached each table and asked, "Are you with the Beer Meetup?" The other patrons were confused. Lefty ordered a beer anyway, and, spotting a consumer-feedback questionnaire, promptly filled it out, adding his e-mail to the bar's distribution list. Then he handed the bartender a *sake* card.

"The board-game people will definitely still be there," Lefty said, referring to the next—and last—event of the evening. It was ten-thirty. As he waited for an uptown bus, he reflected on some of the more memorable Meetups he'd attended. "The Bowling Meetup is really strange—they encourage you not to bowl well," he said. "I like the wine Meetups, especially if you want to meet women."

Women were in scant evidence among the gamers, but David Greene, another Meetup mafioso, was there, playing San Juan, a fantasy card game, and eating Pringles. David and Lefty are co-organizers of the Leftonred and Greene Meetup, which they founded on a whim when, two years ago, they met a hermaphrodite at a vegetarian dinner, were interested, and needed an excuse to see her again. "She asked us what the group was for," Lefty explained. "We said we do female-body finger painting. We've got about thirty regulars now."

—Ben McGrath

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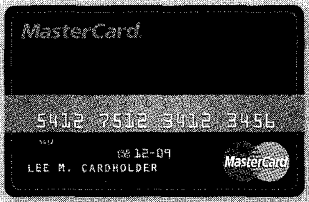

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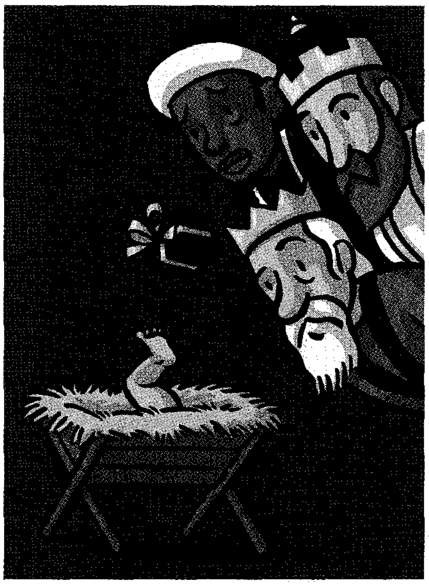
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE GIFT RIGHT OUT

Christmas shopping in the U.S. has been a reliable source of anxiety and stress for well over a century. "As soon as the Thanksgiving turkey is eaten, the great question of buying Christmas presents begins to take the terrifying shape it has come to assume in recent years," the New York *Tribune* wrote in 1894. But recently millions of Americans, instead of trudging through malls in a desperate quest for the perfect sweater, have switched to buying gift cards. The National Retail Federation expects that Americans will buy close to twenty-five billion dollars' worth of gift cards this season, up thirty-four per cent from last year, with two-thirds of shoppers intending to buy at least one card; gift cards now rival apparel as the most popular category of present. This is, in part, because of clever corporate marketing: stores like gift cards because they amount to an interest-free loan from customers, and because recipients usually spend more than the amount on the card—a phenomenon that retailers tenderly refer to as "uplifting" spending. But the boom in gift cards is also a rational response to the most important economic fact about Christmas gift giving: most of us just aren't that good at it.

We all know that bad gifts inflict a cost—just think of the rigid smiles that greet an unwanted floral tie or Josh Rouse CD—but it's surprising how big that cost can be. Since the early nineteen-nineties, Joel Waldfogel, an economist at the University of Pennsylvania, has been doing a series of studies in which college students are asked to put a value on the presents they receive. Waldfogel's main finding is that, in general, people spend a lot more on presents than they're worth to those who receive them, a phenomenon that he calls "the deadweight loss of Christmas." A deadweight loss is created when you spend eighty dollars to give me a sweater that I would spend only sixty-five dollars to buy myself. Waldfogel estimates that somewhere between ten and eighteen per cent of seasonal spending becomes deadweight loss, which means that billions of dollars a year is now going to waste.

Why aren't we better at gift giving? A lot of the time, we don't know the people we're shopping for all that well. Much of the deadweight loss that Waldfogel found was caused by older people, who may not be attuned to what their young relatives really want, and are therefore more likely to give gifts that recipients value less. More surprisingly, though, we're also bad at buying for the people we're closest to. A recent study by the marketing professors Davy Lerouge and Luk Warlop finds that familiarity can actually lead us astray. They ran a series of experiments with long-standing couples in which the partners tried to predict each other's taste in furniture—a sort of academic version of "The Newlywed Game"—and found that, in general, people did a poor job of it. In making predictions, people tend to rely on what Lerouge and Warlop call "pre-stored beliefs and expectations," rather than paying close attention to what their partner really liked. People did a good job of predicting their partner's preferences, in fact, only when they shared those preferences. My idea of what you want, it turns out, has a lot to do with what I want.



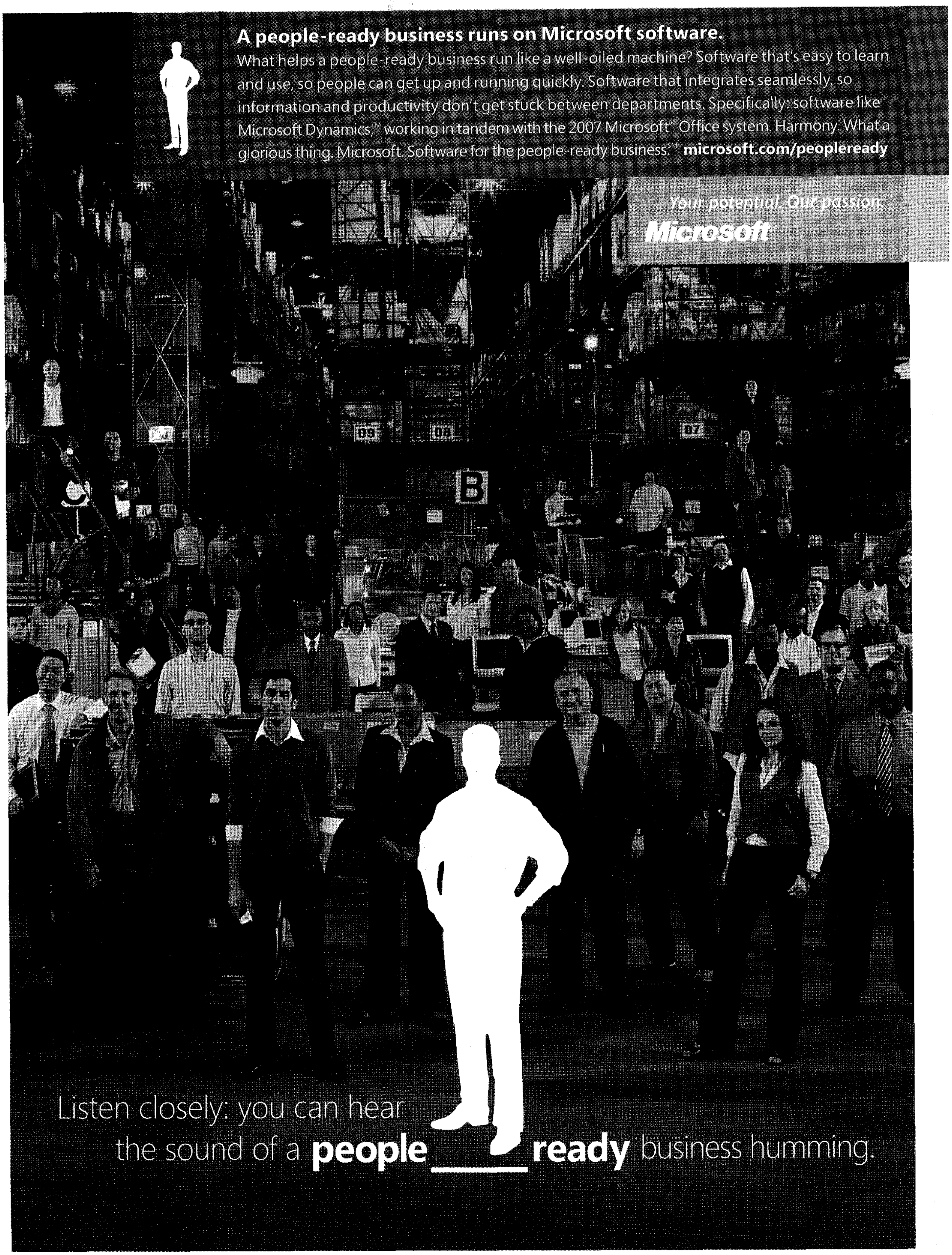
CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Does our incompetence at gift giving matter? Many would say no. Waldfogel, after all, measured the value of presents in purely monetary terms—he explicitly told his subjects to ignore sentimental attachments. But sentiment obviously has a tremendous amount to do with how we respond to gifts. A study by the economists Sara Solnick and David Hemenway shows that we value unrequested gifts more than presents we ask for, because we assume that the former show more thought. And we also go to great lengths to demonstrate that a gift is more than a dollar sign: we snip off price tags, clip the prices off book jackets, and ask for gift receipts that hide the cost of the present.

The problem is that, while we say that gift giving is about sentiment, not about money, we act as if the best expressions of sentiment came in expensive packages. Around a hundred and fifty billion dollars is spent on gifts during the holiday season every year; this year, the average American expects to spend close to a thousand dollars on presents. And, much as sentiment counts, we don't let it stand in the way of getting what we want: according to a survey by the National Retail Federation, forty per cent of America expects to return at least one holiday gift this year, and an American Express survey found that roughly a third of respondents had "re-gifted" presents. If we're spending all this time and money on gifts, the fact that so much of it is wasted matters.

An economist might suggest that the solution is to abandon the pretense and simply start exchanging small piles of money. The boom in gift cards is a kind of socially tolerable version of this: the cards are somehow more personal than cash, and they're also not going to be wasted on an unwanted gift. But Waldfogel's studies also suggest a very different solution: if most of the presents we buy are going to be less valuable in monetary terms than in sentimental ones, then there's no reason to believe that the more expensive gift is a better gift. In fact, the more we spend at Christmas, the more we waste. We might actually be happier—and we'd certainly be wealthier—if we exchanged small, well-considered gifts rather than haunting the malls. Calculating the deadweight loss of Christmas gifts is a coldhearted project, but it leads to a paradoxically warmhearted conclusion: the fact of giving may be more important than what you give. Start with "Bah, humbug" and you somehow end up with "God bless us, every one."

—*James Surowiecki*

**A people-ready business runs on Microsoft software.**

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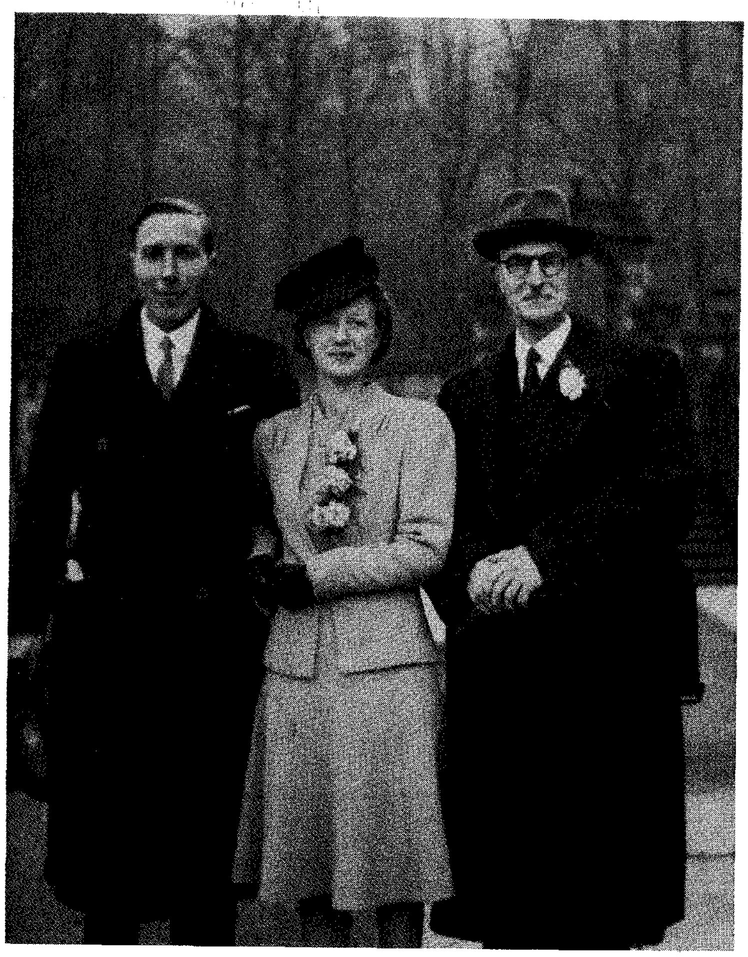
PERSONAL HISTORY

THE PAST CONDITIONAL

What Mother would have wanted.

BY JULIAN BARNES



Albert and Kathleen Barnes on their wedding day, with Bert Scoltock, her father.

COURTESY JULIAN BARNES

I don't believe in God, but I miss Him. That's what I say when the question is put. I once asked my brother, who has taught philosophy at Oxford, Geneva, and the Sorbonne, what he thought of such a statement, without revealing that it was my own. He replied with a single word: "Soppy."

The person to begin with is my maternal grandmother, Nellie Louisa Scoltock, née Machin, who was a schoolteacher in Shropshire until she married my grandfather Bert Scoltock. Not Bertram, not Albert, just Bert: so christened, so called, so buried. He was a headmaster with a certain mechanical dash to him: a motorcycle-and-sidecar man, then the owner of a Lanchester, then, in retirement, the driver of a rather pompously *sportif* Triumph Roadster, with a three-person bench seat in front and two bucket seats when the top was down. By the time I knew my grandparents, they had retired and come south to be near their daughter. My grandmother went to the Women's Institute: she pickled and bottled; she plucked and roasted the chickens and geese my grandfather raised. She was petite, outwardly unopinionated, with the thickened knuckles of old age; she needed soap to get her wedding ring off. Their wardrobe was full of home-knitted cardigans, Grandpa's tending to feature more masculine cable-stitch. They were of that generation advised by dentists to have all their teeth out in one go. This was a normal rite of passage then: from being rickety-gnashered to fully porcelained in one leap, to all that buccal sliding and clacking, to social embarrassment and the foaming glass on the bedside table.

The change from teeth to dentures struck my brother and me as both grave and ribald. But my grandmother's life had contained another enormous change, never alluded to in her presence. Nellie Louisa Machin had been brought up a Methodist. (The Scoltocks were Church of England.) At some point in her young adulthood, my grandmother had lost her faith and, in the smooth narration of family lore, found another: Socialism. I have no idea how strong or weak her religious faith had been, or what her family's politics were; all I know is that she once stood for the local council as a Socialist and was defeated. By the time I knew her, in the nineteen-fifties, she had long since progressed to being a Communist. She must have been one of the few old-age pensioners in suburban Buckinghamshire who took the *Daily Worker* and—so my brother and I insisted to each other—fiddled the housekeeping money to send donations to the newspaper's Fighting Fund.

In the late fifties, the Sino-Soviet Schism took place, and Communists were obliged to choose between Moscow and Peking. For most of the European faithful, this was not a difficult decision; nor was it for the *Daily Worker*, which received money, as well as directives, from Moscow. My grandmother, who had never been abroad in her life, who lived in genteel bungalowdom, decided for undisclosed reasons to throw in her lot with the Chinese. I welcomed her decision with self-interested enthusiasm: her newspaper was now supplemented by a monthly prayer book called *China Reconstructs*, posted directly from the distant continent, and she saved me the stamps from the biscuity envelopes. These stamps tended to celebrate industrial achievement—bridges and hydroelectric dams being much in evidence—or show various breeds of peaceful dove in mid-flight.

My brother did not compete for such offerings, because some years previously there had been a Stamp-Collecting Schism in our home. He had decided to specialize in the British Empire. I, to assert my difference, had announced that I would therefore specialize in a category that I named, with what seemed like logic to me, Rest of the World. The category was defined solely in terms of what my brother didn't collect. I can no longer remember if this move was aggressive, defensive, or merely pragmatic. All I know is that it led to some occasionally baffling exchanges in the school stamp club, among philatelists only recently out of short trousers: "So, Barnesy, what do you collect?" "Rest of the World."

My grandfather was a Brylcreem man, and the antimacassar on his Parker Knoll armchair—a high-backed number with wings for him to snooze against—was not merely decorative. His hair had whitened sooner than my grandmother's; he had a clipped military mustache, a metal-stemmed pipe, and a tobacco pouch that distended his cardigan pocket. He also wore a chunky hearing aid, another aspect of the adult world—or, rather, the world on the farther side of adulthood—which my brother and I liked to mock. "Beg pardon?" we would shout satirically at each other, cupping our hands to our ears. Both of us used to wait and hope for the prized moment when my grandmother's stomach would rumble loudly enough for Grandpa to be roused from his deafness with the inquiry "Telephone, Ma?" Then they would both go back to their newspapers. Grandpa, in his male armchair, his deaf-aid occasionally whistling, his pipe making a hubble-bubble noise as he sucked on it, would shake his head over the *Daily Express*, which described to him a world where truth and justice were constantly imperilled by the Communist Threat. In a softer, female armchair—in the red corner—Grandma would tut-tut away over her *Daily Worker*, which described to her a world where truth and justice, in their updated versions, were constantly imperilled by Capitalism and Imperialism.

Grandpa, by this time, had reduced his religious observance to watching "Songs of Praise" on television. He gardened; he grew his own tobacco and dried it in the garage loft, where he also stored dahlia tubers and old copies of the *Daily Express*, bound with hairy string. He favored my brother, taught him how to sharpen a chisel, and left him his chest of carpentry tools. I can't remember him teaching (or leaving) me anything, though I was once allowed to watch while he killed a chicken in his garden shed. He took the bird under his arm, stroked it into calmness, then laid its neck on some kind of wringing machine screwed to the wall, and brought the handle down, while holding the bird's body ever more tightly to control its final convulsions.

My brother remembers a ritual—never witnessed by me—that he calls the Reading of the Diaries. According to him, Grandma and Grandpa each kept diaries, and in the evenings would sometimes read out loud to each other what they had recorded five years earlier. The entries were apparently of stunning banality but frequent disagreement. Grandpa would propose, "Friday. Fine day. Worked in garden. Planted potatoes." Grandma would reply, "Nonsense," and counter-cite, "Rained all day. Too wet to work in the garden." My brother also remembers that once, when he was very small, he went into Grandpa's garden and pulled up all his onions. Grandpa beat him until he howled, then turned uncharacteristically white, confessed everything to our mother, and swore that he would never again raise his hand against a child. Actually, my brother doesn't remember this, either the onions or the beating; he was just told the story repeatedly by our mother. And, indeed, if he were to remember it he might well be wary of it: he believes that many memories are false, "so much so that, on the Cartesian principle of the rotten apple, none is to be trusted unless it has some external support." I am more trusting, or self-deluding, however, so shall continue as if all *my* memories were true.

Our mother, an only child, was christened Kathleen Mabel. She hated the Mabel, and complained about it to Grandpa, who replied that he "had once known a very nice girl called Mabel." I have no idea about the progress or regress of her religious beliefs, though I

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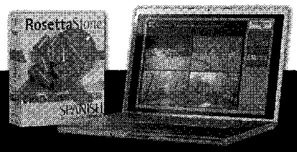

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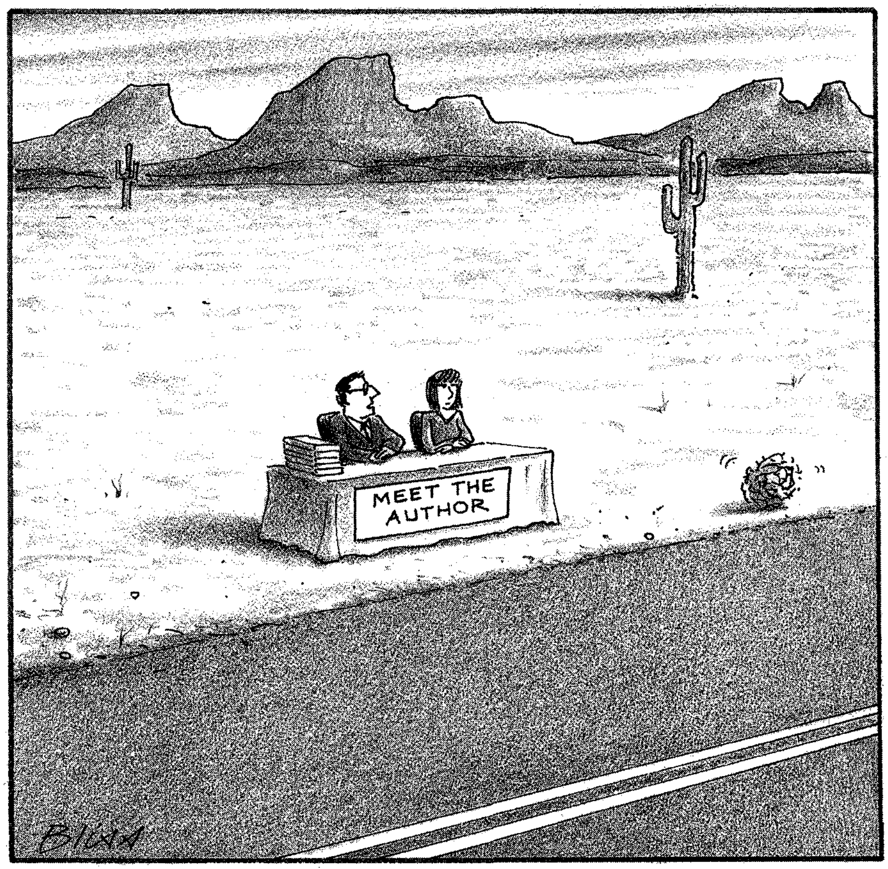
own her prayer book, bound together with "Hymns Ancient and Modern" in soft brown suède, each volume inscribed in surprising green ink with her name and the date: "Dec: 25th 1932." (I admire the punctuation: two full stops and a colon, with the stop beneath the "th" placed exactly between the two letters. You don't get punctuation like that nowadays.) In my childhood, the three unmentionable areas were the usual ones: politics, religion, and sex. By the time I came to discuss these matters with her—the first two, that is, the third being permanently off the agenda—she was "true blue" in politics, a Tory, as I would guess she had always been. As for religion, she told me firmly that she didn't want "any of that mumbo-jumbo" at her funeral. So when the time came, and the undertaker asked if I wanted the "religious symbols" removed from the crematorium wall, I told him that I thought this was what she would have wished.

The past conditional, by the way, is a tense of which my brother is highly suspicious. Waiting for the funeral to start, we had not an argument (which would have been against family tradition) but an exchange which demonstrated that, if I am a rationalist by my own standards, I am a fairly feeble one by his. When my mother was first incapacitated by a stroke, she happily agreed that my brother's daughter C. should have the use of her car. This was the last in a long sequence of Renaults, the marque to which our mother had maintained a Francophiliac loyalty over four decades. So, as we waited in the crematorium car park, I was looking out for the familiar outline when, to my surprise, my niece arrived at the wheel of her boyfriend R.'s car. I observed—mildly, I am sure—"I think Ma would have wanted C. to come in *her* car." My brother, just as mildly, took logical exception to this. He pointed out to me that there are the wants of the dead—i.e., things that people now dead once wanted; and there are hypothetical wants—i.e., things that people would or might have wanted. "What Mother would have wanted" was a combination of the two: a hypothetical want of the dead. It was therefore doubly questionable. "We can only do what *we* want," he said, and to indulge the maternal hypothetical would be as irrational as if he were now to pay attention to his own past desires. I proposed in reply that we should try to do what our mother would have wanted (a) because we had to do *something*, and that something (unless we simply left her body to rot in the back garden of her bungalow) involved making choices; and (b) because we hope that when we die others will do what we in turn would have wanted.



"You are, without a doubt, the worst publicist I've ever had!"

I see my brother infrequently, and so I am often surprised by the ways in which his mind works, but he is quite genuine in what he says. In the car on the way back to London, we had an—to me—even more peculiar exchange about my niece and her boyfriend. They had been together a long time, though there was one period of estrangement, during which C. appeared with another man. My brother and his wife had found this interloper a wimp—indeed, my sister-in-law had taken a mere ten minutes to sort him out. I did not ask the manner of the sorting out. Instead, I asked, "But you approve of R.?"

"It's irrelevant," my brother replied, "whether or not I approve of R."

"No, it's not. C. might want you to approve of him."

"On the contrary, she might want me *not* to approve of him."

"But, either way, it's not irrelevant to *her* whether or not you approve or disapprove."

He thought this over for a moment. "You're right," he said.

You can perhaps tell from these exchanges that he is the older brother.

My mother had expressed no views about the music she wanted at her funeral. I chose the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in E-Flat Major, K. 282. It seemed to last about fifteen minutes, rather than the promised seven, and I found myself wondering at times if this was yet another Mozartean repeat, or if the crematorium's CD player was skipping backward. The previous year, I had appeared on a radio program called "Desert Island Discs"; the Mozart I had chosen for that occasion was the Requiem. Afterward, my mother telephoned me and brought up the fact that during the program I had referred to myself as an agnostic. She told me that this was how my father

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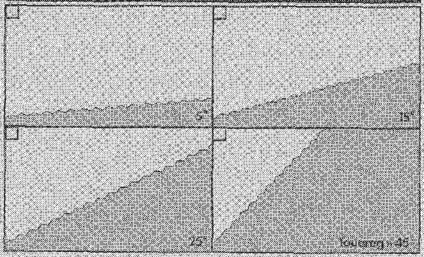

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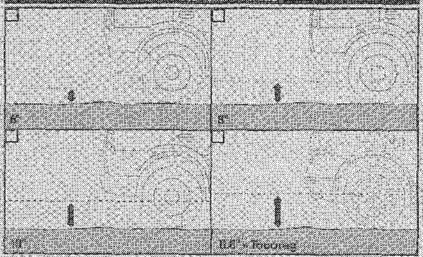

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used to describe himself, whereas she was an atheist. She made it sound as if being an agnostic were a wishy-washy liberal attitude, as opposed to the truth-and-market-forces nature of atheism. "What's all this about death, by the way?" she continued. I explained that I didn't like the idea of it. "You're just like your father," she replied. "Maybe it's your age. When you get to my age, you won't mind so much. I've seen the best of life anyway. And think about the Middle Ages—then life expectancy was really short, but nowadays we live seventy, eighty, ninety years. . . . People only believe in religion because they're afraid of death." My mother, as you can tell, was a clear-minded and opinionated woman who did not have much time for opposing views. Her dominance of the family, and her certainties about the world, made things usefully clear in childhood, restrictive in adolescence, and grindingly repetitive in adulthood.

BLUE SONG

I am tired.
I am tired of speech and of action.
If you should meet me upon the
street do not question me for
I can tell you only my name
and the name of the town I was
born in—but that is enough.
It does not matter whether tomorrow
arrives anymore. If there is
only this night and after it is
morning it will not matter now.
I am tired. I am tired of speech
and of action. In the heart of me
you will find a tiny handful of
dust. Take it and blow it out
upon the wind. Let the wind have
it and it will find its way home.

—*Tennessee Williams*

After her cremation, I retrieved my Mozart CD from the "organist," who, I found myself reflecting, was probably being paid his full organist's fee for putting on and taking off a single CD track. My father, Albert Leonard Barnes, had been dispatched five years earlier, and at a different crematorium, by a working organist earning his money honestly, with Bach. Was this "what he would have wanted"? I don't think he would have objected: he was a gentle, liberal-minded man who wasn't much interested in music. In this, as in most things, he deferred—though not without many an ironic aside—to his wife. His clothes, the house they lived in, the car they drove—such decisions were hers. When I was an unforgiving adolescent, I judged him weak. Later, I found him compliant. Later still, clear in his views, but mostly disinclined to argue for them.

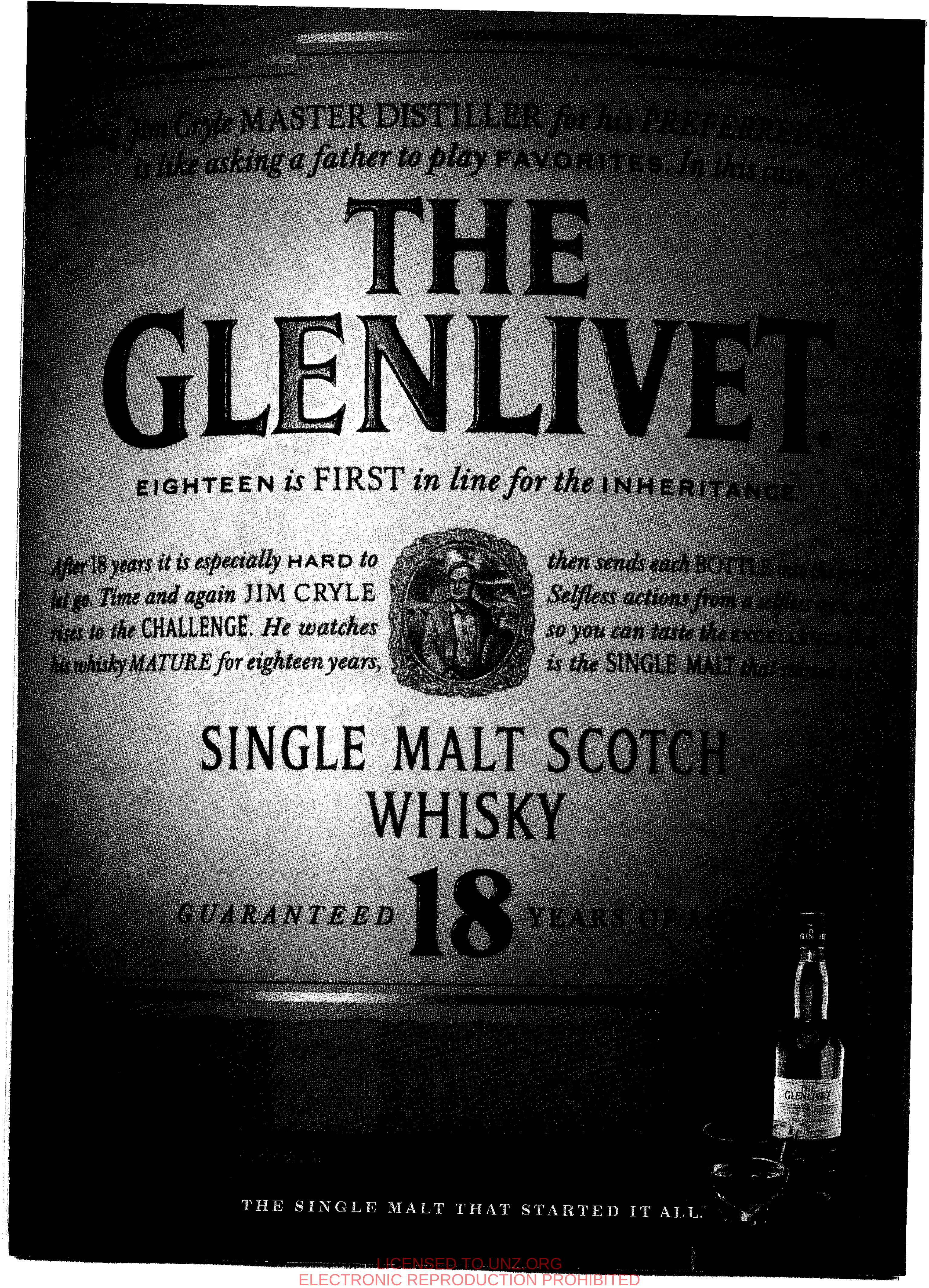
He died a modern death, in hospital, without his family, attended in his final hours by a nurse, after medical science had prolonged his life to the point where the terms on which it was being offered were unimpressive. My mother had visited him a few days previously, but had then gone down with shingles. On that final visit, she had said to him (quite characteristically), "Do you know who I am? Because the last time I was here you didn't know *what* I was." My father had replied (just as characteristically), "I think you're my wife."

I drove my mother to the hospital, where we were given a black plastic bag and a creamy holdall. She sorted through both very quickly, knowing exactly what she wanted and what was to be left for—or, at least, with—the hospital. It was a shame, she said, that he'd never got to wear the big brown slippers with Velcro fastenings that she'd got him a few weeks earlier; mysteriously to me, she took these home with her. She had a horror of being asked if she wanted to see her husband's body. When Grandpa died, she told me, Grandma had been "useless" and had left her to do everything. But at the hospital Grandma, out of some wifely or atavistic need, had insisted on seeing the body, and could not be dissuaded. My mother had accompanied her. When Grandpa's corpse was shown to them, Grandma turned to her daughter and said, "Doesn't he look awful?"

The first time I went to church with my family—for a cousin's wedding—I watched in amazement as my father dropped to his knees in the pew, then covered his forehead and eyes with one hand. Where did that come from, I asked myself, before—as far as I remember—making some halfheartedly imitative gesture of piety, which probably involved a certain amount of squinting around or through my fingers. It was one of those moments when your parents surprise you—not because you have learned something new about them but because you have discovered a further area in which you are ignorant. Was my father merely being polite? Did he worry that if he simply plonked himself down he would be taken for a Shelleyan atheist? I have no idea.

When my mother died, the undertaker, from a nearby village, asked if the family wanted to see the body. I said yes; my brother no. Actually, he said (to me, when I passed on the question), "Good God, no. I agree with Plato on that one." I didn't have the text he was referring to immediately in mind. "What did Plato say?" I asked. "That he didn't believe in seeing dead bodies." When I turned up at the undertaker's—which was more like the rear extension to a haulage business—the funeral director said apologetically, "I'm afraid she's only in the back room at the moment." I looked at him questioningly, and he expanded: "She's on a trolley." I found myself replying, "Oh, she didn't stand on ceremony," though I couldn't claim to know whether she would, or wouldn't, have wanted to do so in the present circumstances.

She lay in a small, clean room with a cross on the wall; she was indeed on a



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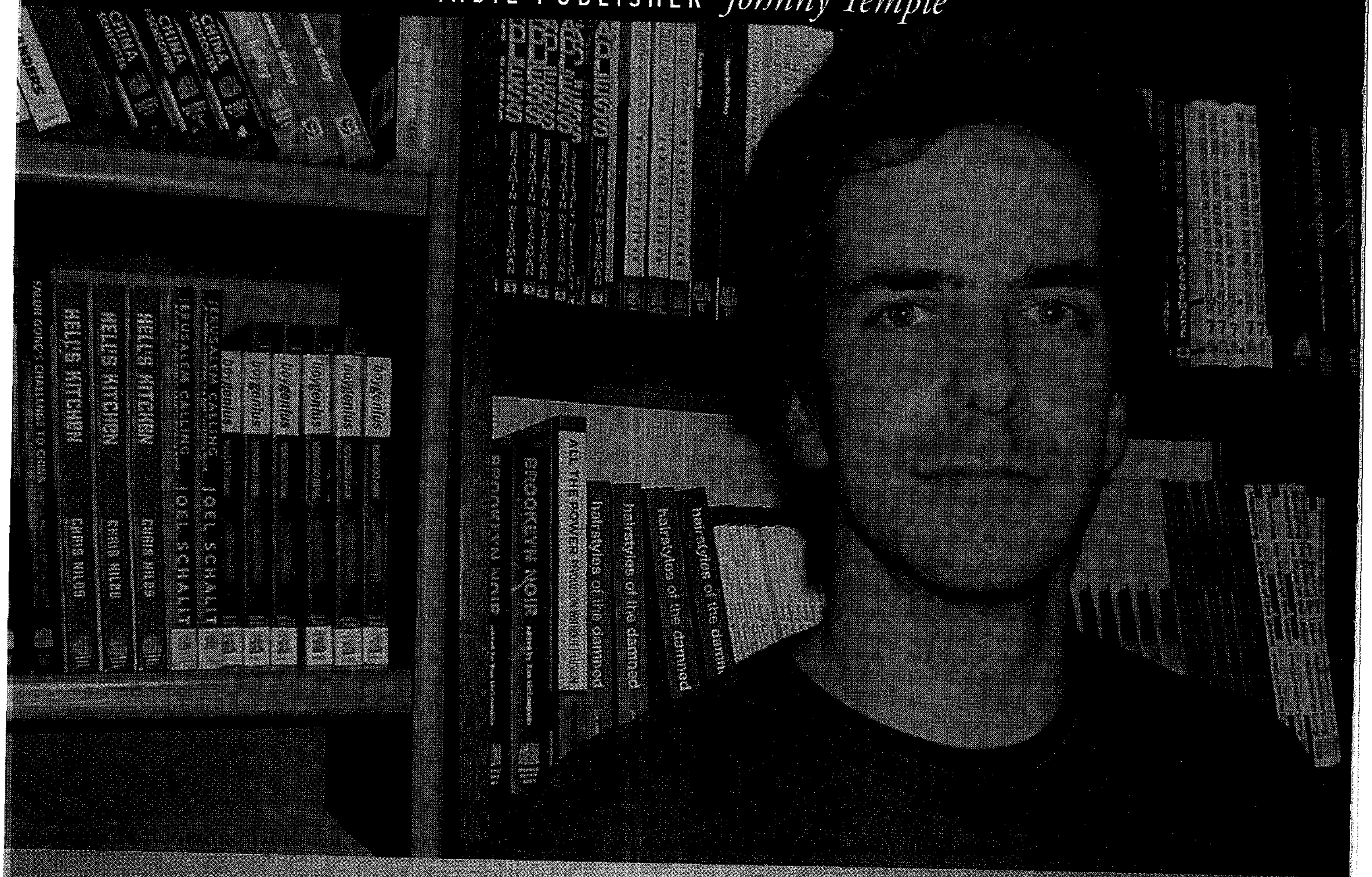

RENAISSANCE MAN WITH A BACKBEAT. Unlike rockers who blow through cash after a tour, bass guitarist Johnny Temple, 40, of the group Girls Against Boys, used the bundle he earned in the nineties as seed money to start Akashic Books, *an independent press.*

Akashic—a Sanskrit word that refers to the concept of a giant, endless *library, a storehouse* for all information—shines a spotlight on work that would otherwise go unseen. Although Temple's passion for literature has overtaken his passion for rock and roll, he remains a player: "We're still officially a band and once or twice a year we go overseas," he says. The post-punk group is booked to tour Athens, *Paris, and* Moscow in February.

Since founding Akashic, Temple has transitioned from being a hobbyist publisher into a full-time one with an annual release schedule of some twenty-five books. His Brooklyn-based company publishes urban literary fiction and political nonfiction by authors outside the mainstream, *including Amiri Baraka,* actor and activist Mike Farrell, and Juan de Recacoechea, winner of Bolivia's National Book Award.

"I'm not interested in competing with or duplicating other publishers' efforts," says Temple, who decries the "lemming mentality" and abjures "trendy feelgood fiction.... It goes back to being a musician and artist-focused. To stick fiction, which is art, in a box contradicts what fiction should be about. The *imperative* as an artist, a writer, or a musician is to do what you do best, not copy *some formula that someone else devised."*

Temple, who can be found many a Friday evening sipping The Glenlivet on the rocks, says, "Scotch appears in books that we publish more than other types of drink. It's a *natural fit.* There is a smoky, sultry, noirish quality that runs through a lot of the books—and I don't *think of Scotch* as *being* a drink of easy redemption." The Glenlivet, the single malt that started it all, salutes Johnny Temple, a fellow Originator.

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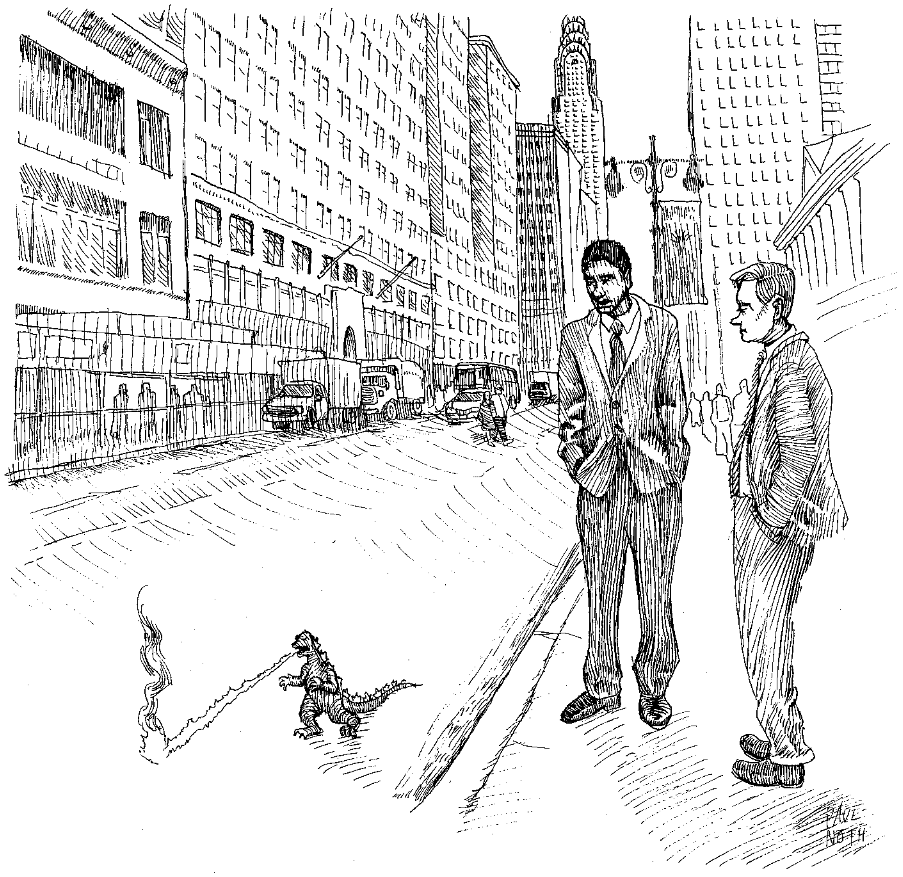
trolley, with the back of her head toward me as I went in, thus avoiding an instant face-to-face. She seemed, well, very dead: eyes closed, mouth slightly open, and more so on the left side than on the right, which was just like her—she used to hang a cigarette in the right corner of her mouth and talk out of the other side. I tried to imagine her awareness, such as it might have been, at the moment of extinction. This had occurred a couple of weeks after she was moved from hospital to a residential home (a term that used to make me wonder what an "unresidential home" might be). She was quite demented by then, a dementia of alternating kinds: one in which she believed herself still in control of things, and constantly ticked off the nurses for imaginary mistakes; the other, acknowledging that she had lost control, in which she became a child again, with all her dead relatives still alive, and what her mother or grandmother had just said of pressing importance. Before her dementia, I had frequently found myself switching off during her solipsistic monologues; suddenly, she had become painfully interesting. I kept wondering where all this stuff was coming from, how her brain was producing this counterfeit reality. Nor could I feel any resentment now that she wanted to talk only about herself.

I was told that two nurses had been with her at the moment of death, and were engaged in turning her over when she had just "slipped away." I like to imagine—because it would have been characteristic, and people should die as they have lived—that her last thought was addressed to herself, and was something like Oh, get on with it, then. But this is sentimentalism—what she would have wanted (or, rather, what I would have wanted for her)—and perhaps, if she was thinking anything, she was imagining herself as a child again, being turned in some fretful fever by her long-dead mother.

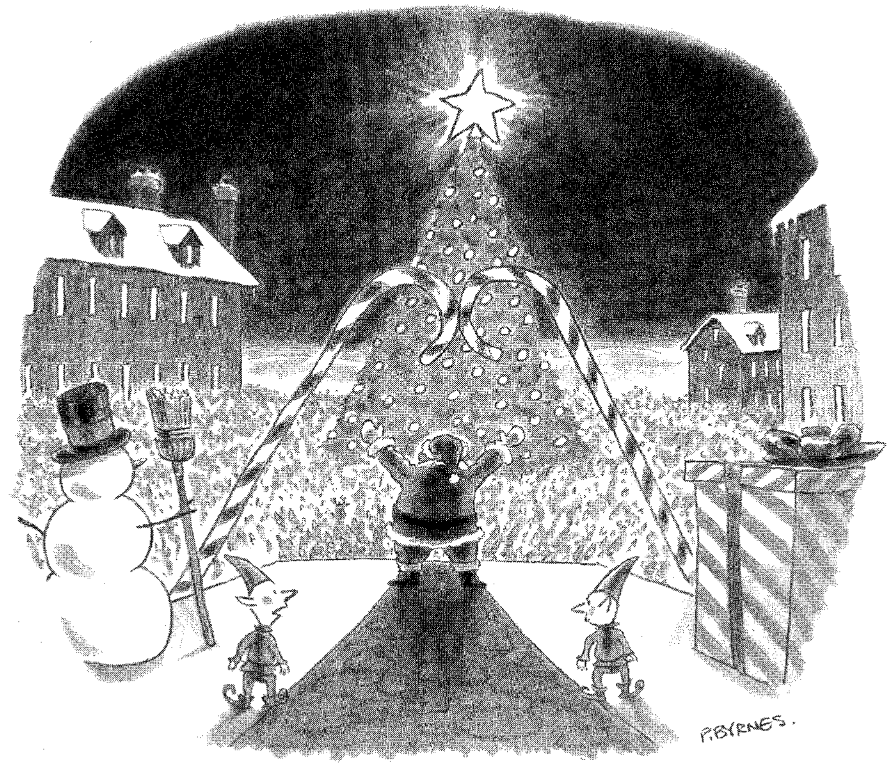
At the undertaker's, I touched her cheek several times, then kissed her at the hairline. No, she didn't look awful: there was nothing overpainted about her, and her hair, she would have been pleased to know, was looking good. ("Of course, I never dye it—it's all natural," she once boasted to my brother's wife.) Was she so cold because she'd been in the freezer, or because the dead are naturally cold? Wanting to see her dead came more, I admit, from writerly curiosity than from filial feeling, but there was a bidding farewell to be done, for all my long exasperation with her. "Well done, Ma," I murmured. She had, indeed, done the dying "better" than my father. He had endured a series of small, then larger, strokes, his decline stretching over years; she had gone from first attack to death altogether more efficiently and speedily. When I picked up her bag of clothes from the residential home, it felt heavier than I thought it should. First I discovered a full bottle of Harveys Bristol Cream, and then, in a square cardboard box, an untouched birthday cake, shop-bought by village friends who had visited her on her final, eighty-second birthday.

My father had died at the same age. I had always imagined that his would be the harder death for me, because I had loved him the more, whereas at best I could only be irritatedly fond of my mother. But it worked the other way round: what I had expected to be the lesser death proved more complicated, more hazardous. His death was just his death; her death was *their* death. And the subsequent house-clearing turned into an exhumation of what we had been as a family—though we were really one only for about the first thirteen or fourteen years of my life. Now, for the first time, I went through my mother's handbag. Apart from the usual stuff, it contained a cutting from the *Guardian* listing the twenty-five greatest postwar English batsmen (though she never read the *Guardian*) and a photograph of our childhood dog, Max, a golden retriever. It was inscribed on the back in an unfamiliar hand, "*Maxim, le chien*," and presumably taken by one of my father's French *assistants* back in the early nineteen-fifties. Max had either run away or, more probably, been stolen, shortly after the picture was taken, and, wherever he had gone, he must have been dead himself for fifty-odd years. Though my father would have liked it, my mother would never have another dog after that.

Given this family background of fading religious belief, I might, as part of adolescent rebelliousness, have become devout. But my father's agnosticism and my mother's atheism were



"I hear he's huge in Japan."



"This doesn't feel the least bit cultish to you?"

• •

never fully expressed, let alone presented as exemplary attitudes, so perhaps their discreet non-beliefs didn't seem to justify revolt. I might, I suppose, if it had been possible to choose, have become Jewish. I went to a school where, out of about nine hundred boys, a hundred and fifty or so were Jewish. On the whole, they seemed cleverer, and both socially and sartorially more advanced; they had better shoes (one contemporary even had a pair of elastic-sided Chelsea boots) and they knew about girls. They also got extra holidays, which seemed an advantage. And it would have usefully shocked my parents, who had the low-level anti-Semitism of their time and class. (As the credits rolled at the end of a TV play and a name like Aaronson occurred, one or the other of my parents might comment wryly, "Another Welshman.") Not that they behaved any differently to my Jewish friends, one of whom was named, rightly, it seemed to me, Alex Brilliant. He was reading Wittgenstein at sixteen, and writing poetry that rippled with ambiguities—double, triple, quadruple, like heart bypasses. He took a scholarship to Cambridge, after which I lost sight of him; but I would occasionally think of him down the years, assuming that he had forged ahead in one of the liberal professions. I was over fifty when I learned that for more than half my life I had been thinking of someone as alive who was in fact dead. Brilliant had killed himself in his twenties, for no reason my informant could determine.

So I had no faith to lose, only a resistance (which felt more heroic than it was) to the mild regimen of God-referring that an English education entailed: Scripture lessons, morning prayers and hymns, and an annual Thanksgiving service at St. Paul's Cathedral. (Giving thanks for what? Life, another year, exam results, the founding of the school?) And that was it, apart from the role of second shepherd in a nativity play at my primary school. I was never baptized, never sent to Sunday school. I have never been to a normal church service in my life. I do baptisms, marriages, funerals. I am constantly going into churches, but for architectural reasons, and—more widely—to get a sense of what Englishness once was.

My brother had slightly more liturgical experience than I did. As a Wolf Cub, he went to a couple of regular church services. "I seem to recall being mystified, an infantile anthropologist among the anthropophagi," he writes. When I ask about his own de-Christianization, he replies, "Loss of faith? I never lost it, since I never had it to lose. But I realized it was all a load of balls on 7 Feb 1952, at 9.00. Mr. Ebbets, headmaster of Derwentwater Primary School, announced that the King had died, that he had gone to eternal glory and happiness in Heaven with God, and that in consequence we were all going to wear black armbands for a month. I thought that there was something fishy there, and How Right I Was. No scales fell from my eyes, there was no sense of loss, of a gap in my life, etc. etc. Nor have I ever had any religious inklings. I hope," he adds, "that this story is true. It is certainly a very clear and lasting memory; but you know what memory is."

My brother would have been just nine at the time of George VI's death. My own final letting go of the remnant, or possibility, of religion happened at a more advanced age. As an adolescent, hunched over some book or magazine in the family bathroom, I used to tell myself that God couldn't possibly exist, because the notion that he might be watching me with disapproval while I masturbated was absurd; even more absurd was the notion that all my dead ancestors might be lined up and watching, too. This wasn't exactly a strong argument, more a mild yet convincing feeling. And it was, of course, self-interested: the thought of Grandma and Grandpa observing what I was up to would have seriously put me off my stroke.

As I record this now, however, I wonder why I didn't think through more of the possibilities. Why did I assume that God, if He *was* watching, necessarily disapproved of how I was spilling my seed? Why did it not occur to me that, if the sky did not fall in as it witnessed my zealous and unflagging self-abuse, it was perhaps because the sky did not think it a sin? Nor did I have the imagination to conceive of my dead ancestors equally smiling on my actions: Go on, my son, enjoy it while you've got it; there won't be anything like that when you're a disembodied spirit; we wish we'd done more of it in our time, so have another one for us. Perhaps Grandpa would have taken his celestial pipe out of his mouth, given me an uncharacteristic wink, and murmured complicitly, "I once knew a very nice girl called Mabel." ♦

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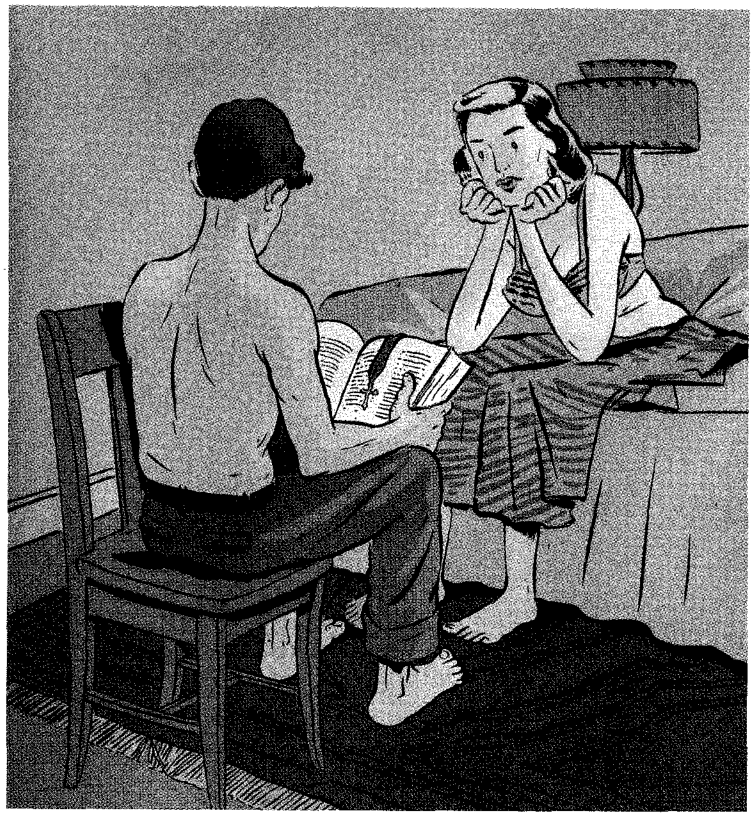
FICTION

THE BIBLE

BY MARGUERITE DURAS



ZOHAR LAZAR

He was twenty, she eighteen. He approached her one evening at the Café du Relais Saint-Michel. He told her that he had just come from his sociology class. For her part, she waited several days to tell him that she was a salesgirl in a shoe store. They got into the habit of meeting up in the back room of the Relais—usually around six-ten, after she got off work at the store. She was happy to find him there every night: he was company for her; he was polite and sweet. She was happy to find someone with whom she could pass the pre-dinner hours before heading back to her room. She didn't talk much—it was he who told her things. He told her about Islam and the Bible. This didn't surprise her particularly, even though he returned to the subject again and again. It didn't surprise her, nothing surprised her: that was just the way she was made; nothing really surprised her.

The first night he talked to her about Islam. The next day he slept with her and he talked to her about the Bible. He asked her whether she'd read it. She told him that she hadn't. The following day, he brought a Bible with him and he read Ecclesiastes to her in the back room of the Relais. He read it loudly, his hands on his ears, in a passionate voice, following a liturgical rhythm. She was embarrassed by this and she wondered whether he wasn't a little crazy. Afterward, he asked her what she'd thought of it. She hadn't listened very carefully while he was reading because she was so embarrassed by it. She told him that it seemed reasonable to her, that it was fine. He smiled at her response; he explained that it was a fundamental text and that it was necessary to learn it.

He had seen the Nash papyrus at the British Museum; he told her about it. He had spent several hours in front of the glass case, and he'd gone back again the next day, and for several days after that. He would never forget those moments. All that was left on the Nash papyrus was a few lines from Exodus. He talked to her about Exodus. "And the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. . . . And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. . . ." He told her about all the Bibles—the Vulgate and the Septuagint, as well as the Vatican, the Sinaiticus, the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin Bibles.

He never wanted to talk about her, and he never asked whether she was happy working in the shoe store, or how she'd come to Paris, or what she liked. They made love together. She liked to make love. It was one of the things that she liked. While they were making love, they didn't speak. Once he was finished, he started talking again about St. Jerome, who had spent his life translating the Bible.

He was thin, a little hunched. His hair was wavy and black, and he had very beautiful blue eyes, lined with thick black lashes. His skin was pale, his mouth very expressive, his pale lips barely grazing his teeth. He had a round nose, pronounced cheekbones. He wasn't particularly clean—the collars of his shirts left something to be desired, and so did his nails, which were pink and rounded and too big for his slender hands, making the tips of his fingers look like spatulas. He had a concave chest. He had spent his youth reading the sacred texts of Islam and of Christianity. He had learned Hebrew, Arabic, English, German. He was still studying Arabic at the École des Langues Orientales—though, in fact, he knew it so well already that, while he was only in his second year when they met, he could read the Koran in the original.

Sometimes he took her out to dinner, but always to cheap restaurants. He confessed one night that he was buying, on layaway, a Hebrew Bible from the sixteenth century. His father was rich, but gave him very little money. Still, he hadn't been able to resist buying this Bible; he

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had already paid for a third of it, and would pay it off entirely the following month. He dreamed of the moment when he'd have that Bible in his hands.

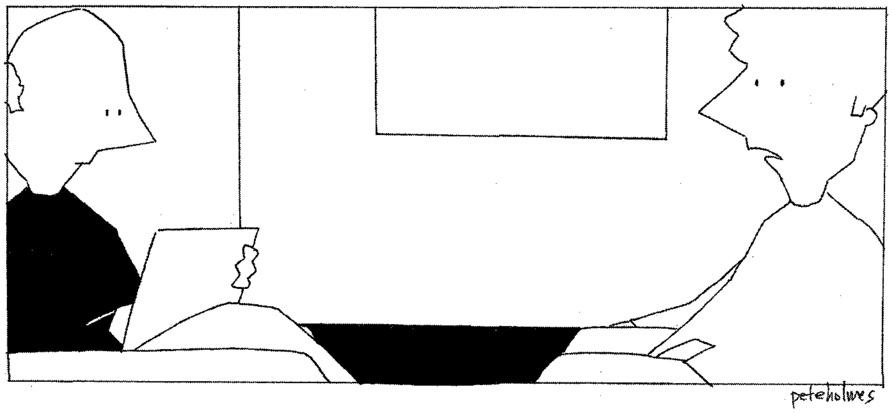
Even after they'd known each other for three weeks, they still hadn't talked about anything other than the Bible and Islam. Always, he spoke to her of God, and of the eternal appeal that the idea of God held for men. She, herself, didn't believe in God; she didn't feel the least need to believe in God. She knew that there were people who believed in God, who felt that need. She didn't believe that she'd spend the rest of her life at the shoe store; she believed that she'd get married and have children. She believed that she had been given her chance in the world—that was her only way of believing in God.

He didn't believe in God, either, but that didn't bring him any consolation. He was indifferent to his father's fortune, which was significant; it had been acquired through the process of vulcanizing tires for cars. He spoke sometimes of his house in Neuilly, and of a property in Hossegor. She knew that they would never get married. He didn't even ask himself the question.

She had never known a man like him. He talked about Muhammad the way one would talk about a brother—he told her about Muhammad's life, his marriage to a merchant's widow, his liaison with Maria the Copt. He knew the stories of each of Muhammad's fourteen wives, Muhammad who had undertaken the task of monotheizing the Arabs. It had been a grand idea—Muhammad had defended it with a weapon in his hand and with celestial courage. It seemed to her a strange undertaking, but she said nothing to him. Nor did she tell him that sometimes she had had enough of helping people try on shoes all day. No, she kept those thoughts to herself; she didn't, in any case, imagine that they would interest anyone—and that seemed normal to her. In the end, she got used to his ways, and whenever he wanted to recite entire suras of the Koran in Arabic, she let him do so; she thought that he was a nice guy. He bored her.

He bought her a pair of stockings; he was a kind man. But since they'd begun sleeping together, she had no joy in her life. One night, she understood why. I am not made for him, she told herself. All her strength, her youthful joie de vivre seemed to shrivel in his presence; she couldn't help it. Still, she was flattered. In a sense, she was lucky; she told herself that she learned things when she was with him. But those things brought her no pleasure. It was as if she had already known them, so small was her need to learn them. But she did try to please him; in the evening she read the Gospels, as he had asked her to. What Christ said to his mother made her want to cry. That he had been crucified so young, before his mother's eyes, was even more revolting. But—it wasn't her fault—she couldn't go beyond a certain level of emotion. She did not think that he was God, this man. She thought that he was a man who'd had very noble plans; his death gave him back his humanity, which meant that she was unable to read his story without thinking of that of her own father, who had died the year before, crushed by an industrial wagon, one year before his retirement. He'd been the victim of an injustice that had begun long ago. That injustice had never ceased to exist on earth—it continued through the generations of man. ♦

(*Translated, from the French, by Deborah Treisman.*)



"I think I accidentally repressed my good memories."

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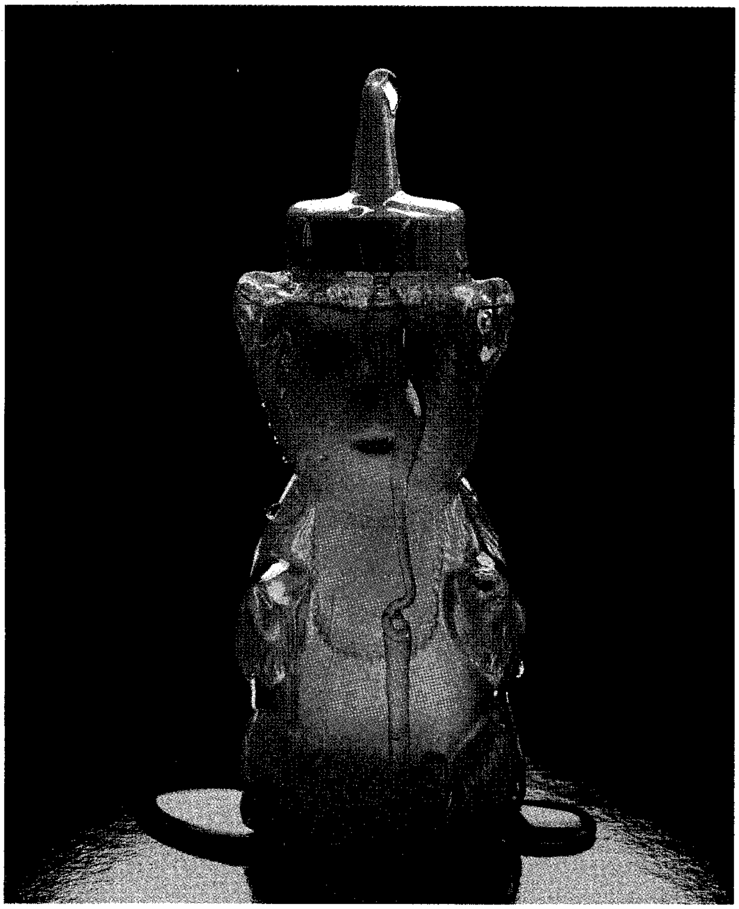
FICTION

DEMOLITION

BY LOUISE ERDRICH



I used to have a girlfriend who was slightly bigger than me. In bed, C. moved with the agility of a high-school wrestler; she was incredibly quick. She'd be on top, and then in a split second underneath me, with no break in the fluidity of our motion. It was as if we were travelling somewhere every time we got into bed—cross-country or on a train trip—and we often had trouble with hunger while making love. In certain positions, I'd get famished and weak. She'd make a sandwich or two and bring the food with us to the bedroom. Sometimes there'd be a glass of milk on the bedside table, and there was always a little squeeze bear full of honey, which she drank from like a bottle. C. was a great believer in the restorative power of milk and honey. On occasion, to rejuvenate me, she'd squirt the honey directly into my mouth, then dip a cloth into the cool glass of milk and wipe me down. In the summer, I soured in the heat, and one day my father noticed the smell when I walked in the door. C. was quite a bit older than me and our love affair was clandestine, so I told him on the spur of the moment that I'd got work at the creamery.

He misheard me.

"What? The cemetery?"

"Yes," I said. Which is how I really did end up working in the Town of Pluto Cemetery. So that my lie would not be discovered, I walked over there the next day, looking for a job. I was hired by a man named Sprecht, who had been there most of his life. He was something of an amateur historian, and his little office was plastered with news clippings and obituaries. He had mapped out the graveyard, and he knew everything there was to know about the people buried there: when they had come to town and what they had done, the cause and moment of their deaths, what property they'd left behind. My grandfather Coutts was buried there, his grave marked by a tall limestone obelisk, with these words at the base: *Qui finem vitae extremum inter munera ponat naturae.* "It is as natural to die as to be born." There was a space next to him for his wife. She had remarried and was buried with her second husband. My mother was nearby, with a nice dark stone wide enough for two. She had also been given to quotes, though not in Latin. She'd liked Thoreau and detested all trivialities. Her stone read "Blessed are they who never read a Newspaper, for they shall see Nature, and, through her, God." My father had already had his name incised next to hers, along with his birth date. There was a blank space for his death date, which I didn't like to see, but he was somehow comforted by it.

Sprecht pointed out some additional space and observed that my great-grandfather had bought a large family plot. There would be room there for me and my wife, even for a couple of kids. This prospect seemed far off and laughable back then, but as time has passed I have become increasingly grateful that those places next to my ancestors lie empty and waiting. I was seventeen when I began digging graves for the Pluto dead. I measured with string and used four tent pegs to anchor the string in a rectangle. Later, we bought a chalk roller of the same sort that was used to mark the high-school football field. I took the grass off in sections, peeling it back like a scalp, and laid the squares on a piece of wet burlap. I used a toylike backhoe and finished the graves by hand with a straight spade. After the burials, I'd cover up the coffins, making a mound so that the ground wouldn't dent once the dirt had settled. I cut the grass, too, with

STEVE BRONSTEIN / GETTY IMAGES

a finicky gas mower, and learned how to trim the trees so that they would grow in a graceful, natural shape. I also learned how to keep the death records in order, and after a while I knew the cemetery map as well as Sprecht did. I could easily guide people when they needed assistance finding a relative, or wanted to see the war memorial, the ornate Russian ironwork crosses, or the humble, common fieldstones that marked the graves of a family murdered here long ago.

My job at the cemetery was supposed to last a summer, to fill the time until I went to college. But once I started having sex with C. I couldn't leave sex, or her, or Pluto. Besides, spending my days among the dead, I had grown used to the peace and quiet, as Sprecht had told me I would. I even started adding to his collection of clippings. One controversy at the time involved the proliferation in our town of bars that featured topless dancers. There was a community battle as to whether the bars should be allowed to exist. We clipped and posted all of the editorials. "If only people could see things as we do," Sprecht said. "Topless or bottomless, we all end up in the ground."

Six months later, he did, too. I dug his grave with unusual care, as befitted one who had so faithfully cared for the journey of his fellow-citizens. There was really no one else to take his place, and so, at the age of twenty, I became the manager of the Town of Pluto Cemetery, which made it very easy to keep my love secret—nobody wanted to date me.

I don't mean that women were put off by my line of work. On the contrary, it often seemed to fascinate them. But there was clearly a lack of future in it, which girls could see. I wasn't bothered. I found myself on the pro side of the topless-dancing controversy, because I liked watching a stripper named Candy, who took lollipops from her G-string and tossed them to the audience. She used hygienically wrapped safety pops—ever since a patron of the bar had inhaled a straight-stem sucker, perhaps gasping at one of Candy's novel moves. I hadn't had to bury him, but it was close. So now she gave out the same kind of lollipops that grocery stores give to kids. In fact, that's where she got them—free. I got to know Candy a little, and I was delighted that this friendship made C. jealous enough to fight with me. While I was seeing Candy—or, actually, just flirting with her—C., who was a doctor, renovated her old house and moved her practice there, in order to be closer to me.

The cemetery marked the western edge of town. On its other sides, the graveyard faced buildings that kept a discreet distance. C. owned the only house that had a yard abutting the cemetery. She remodelled the living rooms and turned the porch into a waiting room. The back she left leafy and private. I could walk out of my equipment shed, which was set right next to a windbreak of pines, and enter C.'s back door without being seen.

My life went calmly along for years after Sprecht died. One fine June, I worked as always in the garden around my house. After the lilacs and the mock orange had folded, there were the roses, the irises, and then the peonies. This succession of color and scent has always taken me out of myself, sent me spinning. As soon as I got up each morning, I'd head out. The bees were always there, surrounding me with their small vibrating bodies. They followed me as I worked, but I like bees. I brushed them off gently, and they rarely stung me. After I finished weeding and watering, I went quietly into my father's room, where he slept upright with a cannister of oxygen. The rigors of his condition made him sharp and bitter for a time, but even when he was feeling awful we still enjoyed each other's company. He was a tall, bony, clever man, half Chippewa. He liked to joke, and had been very dedicated to my mother, and then to me.

"Where are you going?" he asked. His voice was a rasp by then. He knew where I was going, of course, but he wanted to get his line in.

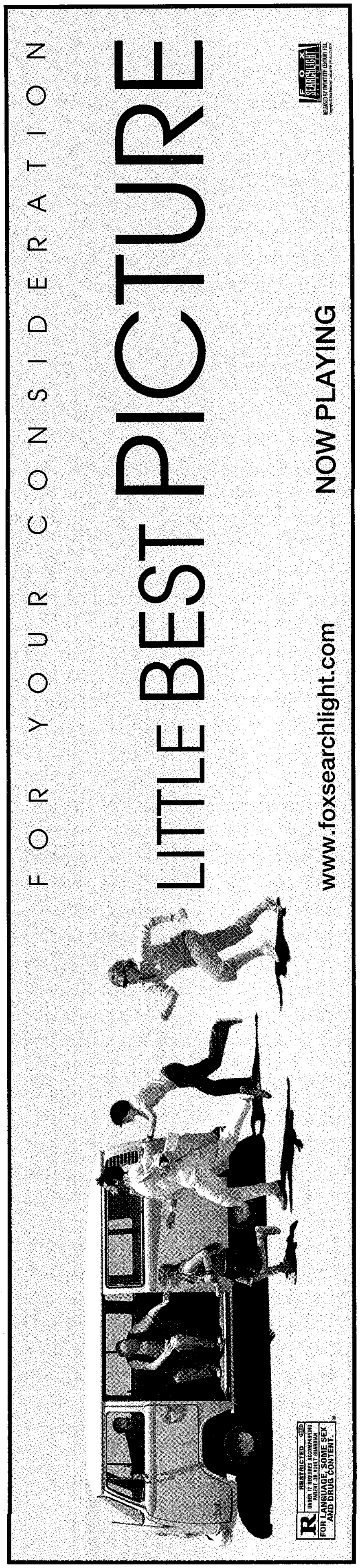
"To work."

"You'll be digging a grave for me soon!"

He cried this out with baleful joy. I wheeled him to the bathroom door, and he rose, supporting himself on the railing I'd installed.

"*Get lost!*"

I closed the door. We were both dreading the day when even this last piece of privacy would be taken from us. We had considered the Pluto Retirement Home, but it was expensive, and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THE TREE CUTTERS

You can't see them and then you can,
like bear cubs in the treetops working for man,
hoisting one another with ropes and pulleys
that seem the clearest possible metaphor
for bright feelings vs. dark feelings,
as I lie in the grass below, hearing the big limbs fall,
like lightning exploding on the lake.

Once, a thick, dirty, bad-smelling sorrow
covered me like old meat: I saw a bloodstained toad,
instead of my white kitten; I saw shadows and misprision,
instead of my milk and pancakes. "Maybe God has gone away,"
my life moaned, hugging my knees, my teeth, my terrible pride,
though, after a time, like a warm chrysalis, it produced
a tough, lustrous thread the pale yellow of onions.

—*Henri Cole*

to keep him there we would have had to sell the house, which was a beautiful and comforting old place on a double lot, which I'd planted and gardened all my life. My father wanted me to have the house. To that end, he was cheerfully trying to die. He weakened himself by not eating and hoped to suffocate himself in his sleep by not using his oxygen. His natural toughness was not fooled by these tricks.

"All right, I'm done," he called out, and I helped him from the toilet back to his walker. In the kitchen, he ate a bit of toast and sipped a cup of coffee. I urged him to drink some water, but he was trying to dehydrate himself, too. As he did every day, he asked me what I'd be doing in the evening. It worried him that I hardly went out anymore.

"I'm going to play poker with you, then I'm watching the news and turning out the lights."

"You need a wife."

"Yes, I do."

"You're not going to find one by sitting home with your dad."

"I know the one I want."

"Give up on that old hen!" he said, swiping at me. He had found out about C. sometime earlier. "Get yourself a spring chicken and give me a grandchild! She cured your cancer, but she's no good for you otherwise."

As a boy, I'd had a strange series of lumps on my head. They came and went until C. effected a miracle cure—which was painless, as I remember, and left no mark. My father was convinced that I'd had brain cancer, though it likely wasn't much more than cysts or warts. I didn't correct him, though, as he thought I owed my life to C., and that made it harder for him to disapprove of our relationship.

I was always eager to get to the graveyard in early summer. Fewer people died at that time of year. Mostly, there were just visitors. While I was working there, the cemetery was deemed the most picturesque cemetery in the state; it was in brochures. When the full sun hit, the peonies burst from their compact balls into spicy, shredded, pink confetti-petalled flowers. I took a Mason jar to fill with blossoms for C.

I remember that day specifically, because it was the day that she told me she was going to marry the man who had remodelled her office.

"It's the only way I can break this off," she said.

I was bewildered. "I'm old enough now. Why don't you marry me?"

"You know the answer."

"I thought that age was going to stop mattering someday."

"I used to think so, too."

"You think I care what people think? I don't care what people think!"

But she had her profession, her standing, the trust of her patients to think about. I'd heard it all again and again.

"Can't it be over now?" she asked, her voice weary.

"No," I told her.

And it wasn't, although she did marry Ted Bursap, a general contractor. Ted was only five years younger than C. He believed that there was a future in Pluto, and his first wife had conveniently just died. I'd buried her myself—in plain pine. I'd taken that as a sign of Ted's cheapness, though it's possible that it was what she'd wanted. C.'s marriage so grieved me that I started taking correspondence courses in my father's and grandfather's profession, and found that I liked the law. Of course, we had a terrific law library in the house, two generations of books. I began reading Marcus Aurelius out loud to my father in the evenings. For a while, everything written after 300 A.D. seemed useless to me, except case law, which told me that nothing had truly changed since those men were writing.

For a year after C.'s wedding, I tried not even to look in the direction of her house. But we could not stay apart forever. One dusty summer evening, I watched from the cemetery as the sun turned white hot and then red. I followed that enormous ball of fire as it sank into the pine trees. I looked in the direction where I had resisted looking and saw Ted pulling out of the driveway in his pickup, then I walked between the graves and through the back yard the way I'd used to, and there she was, waiting for me on the back steps. She had sat there after work every night all that year. She couldn't help it, she said, but she'd promised herself that she'd never let me know, that she'd let me get on with my life.

Ted, it turned out, had gone to Hoopdance to work out a bid on some construction job, and he would be an hour there and an hour back, at least. Those two hours were different from any we had ever spent before. The whole time that we were making love, we watched each other's face, watched as the expressions came and went. We saw the pleasure and the tenderness. We saw the helplessness. We saw the need that was a beautiful sickness between us. The only problem with those old philosophers, I thought, as I was walking back through the graves, was that they didn't give enough due to the unbearable weight of human sexual love. It was something they saw as hindering deliberation, at war with reason, and apt to stain a man's honor, which, of course, I accepted.

Ted had built many of the newer houses in Pluto. He was also responsible for most of the least attractive buildings in town. He bought up old properties—graceful houses just beginning to decay and churches that had consolidated their congregations or lost them to time—then he stripped them of their oak trim or carved doors or stained-glass windows and sold it all as salvage to people in the cities. He tore down the shells and put up eightplex apartment buildings that were so hideous—aluminum-sided or fake-bricked, with shingled mansard roofs or flimsy inset balconies—it was a wonder the town council couldn't see it. Ted had torn down the old railroad depot and put up a quonset hut. I'd hated him even before he married the woman I loved, but afterward, of course, I thought often of how happy I would be to bury him, how fast I'd dig a grave next to his poor pine-boxed wife. He was always smiling, cheerful. He did not love C. the way I did; she had not saved his life, either—she had only fixed his hernia. They'd never had passion, she told me, though Ted was a patient man and treated her well.

Once we got back together, I had to avoid Ted, as well as C.'s receptionist and all of her patients—the whole town, in fact. But C. was the shout and I was the echo. I loved her even more than before. There were times when we were so happy. One afternoon, she let me into the darkened hallway between the garage and her kitchen. Inside, she had the blinds pulled, too.

"You want some eggs?" she asked. "Some coffee?"

"I'll take some coffee."

"A sandwich?"

"That sounds good. What kind?"

"Oh . . ." She opened the refrigerator and leaned into its humming glow. "Sardines and macaroni."

"Just the sardines."

She laughed. "A sardine sandwich."

She made the sandwich for me carefully, placing the fish just so on the bread, the lettuce on top, scraping mustard onto both slices with a steak knife. She put the plate before me. This part of my day—five to six o'clock—was always spent in her kitchen with the window blinds shut, no matter whether it was sunny or dark, though Ted could have walked in at almost any time and found nothing objectionable in our conversation or behavior. I told C. everything that was happening to me, from my dreams and the books I'd read to my memories of my mother, and C. did the same with me. We never talked about the future anymore—she refused to, and I had to accept that. The present was enough, though my work in the cemetery told me every day what happens when you let an unsatisfactory

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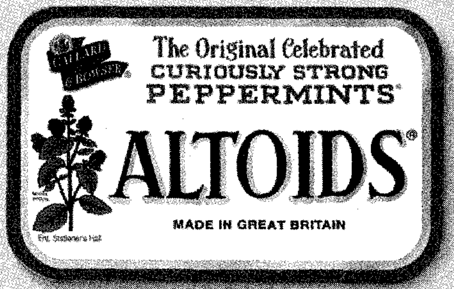

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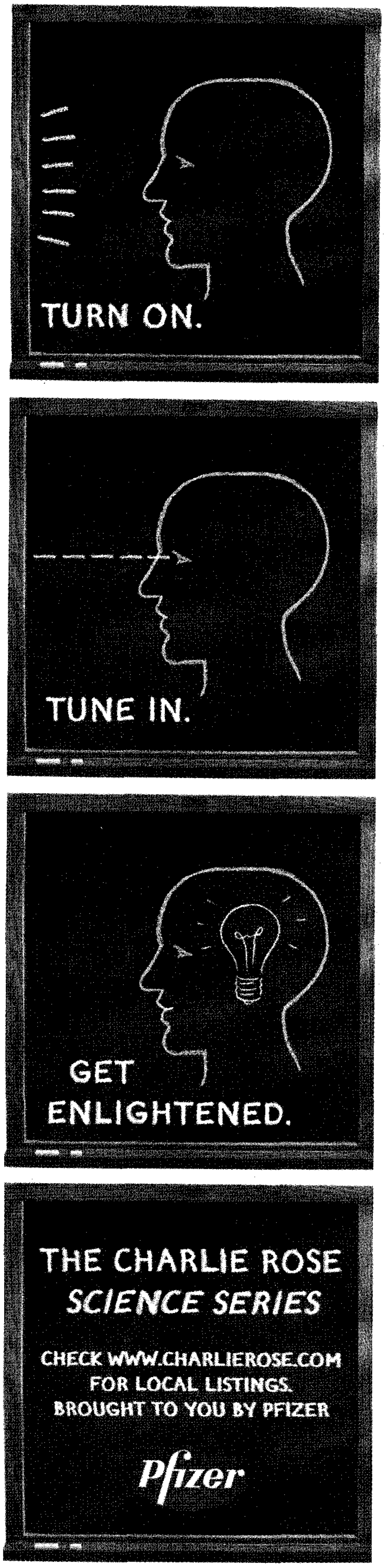
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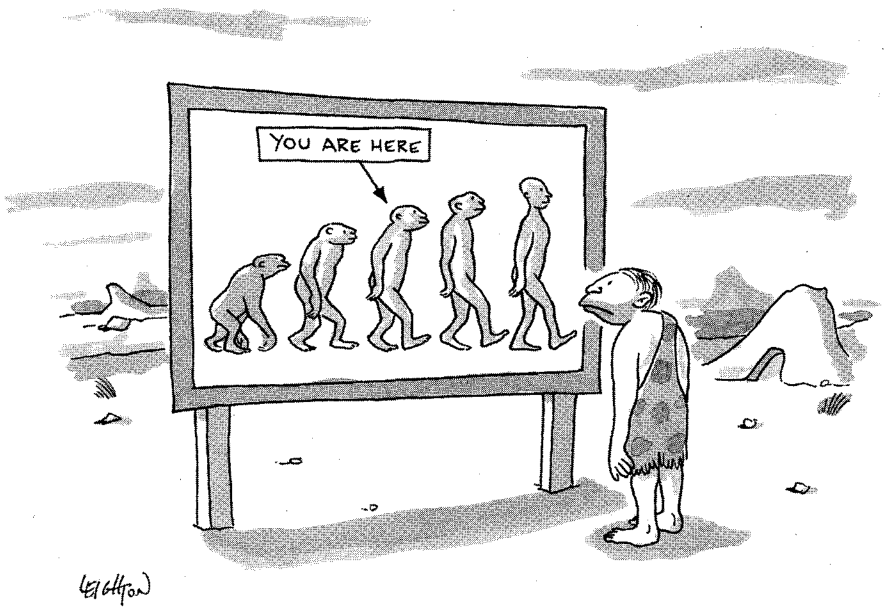

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present go on too long: it becomes your entire history.

"The universe is transformation." I'd already picked my quote.

I watched C.'s hair change from a sun-stroked blond to a dark wavy mass that vibrated against her neck as she lay beside me or swayed on top of me or held me from beneath. Gray strands and shoots arched from her side part back into a loose topknot. Her hair turned back to sunny blond, as she began to touch it up. She clipped it short. By that time, its silken lustre had dulled. I saw her eyes go from a direct blue, the shade of willowware china, to a washed-out sea-glass color. I even watched her clothes change, the newly bought shirts going limp over time, turning from dress-up blouses that she wore to church into paint-spattered clothes that she threw on to water the lawn. I saw her skin freckle, her throat loosen, her teeth chip, her lips crease. Only her bones did not change; their admirable structure stayed sharp and resonant, fitting marvellously beneath her nervous skin. I witnessed these changes and was reassured about my own.

That day, since Ted was in Fargo on business, we decided that it would be one of our rare occasions to go down to the basement. Her basement had a back door and a front door, and a kind of alarm, which was her dog, Pogo, who barked at anyone who entered the house, even Ted. We were very careful. We did not upset the balance of things. We were never discovered. Only, because our times were so far between and our caution so great, the intensity built.

Now making love became not a journey but a homecoming. We realized that we were lost in the everyday world, so lost that we didn't even know it. When we made love, it was as though we had travelled a long distance. As though, after all the days and weeks apart, we had finally arrived. When we were at home, in each other's arms, lying in the cool of the basement, it seemed as if the world had spun into place around us. It seemed as if our harmony should be reflected in the order of the house, the yard, the town. But when I left I saw that only the cemetery was in order. Only the dead were at equilibrium.

Walking home, I thought about C.'s skin, her freckles, and the scent of dish soap on her hands, the sardine oil, the white bread, the animal closeness when she opened her legs. I was used to the smothered emptiness, the sick longing I endured every time we parted. It would smooth out, it would even out, over the weeks. The universe is transformation. But, for us, nothing changed.

Yet the moment I walked in the door of my house that afternoon I knew that something was different. Something had happened—to my father. The silence was peculiar. The suspension. As if we were playing some game and he

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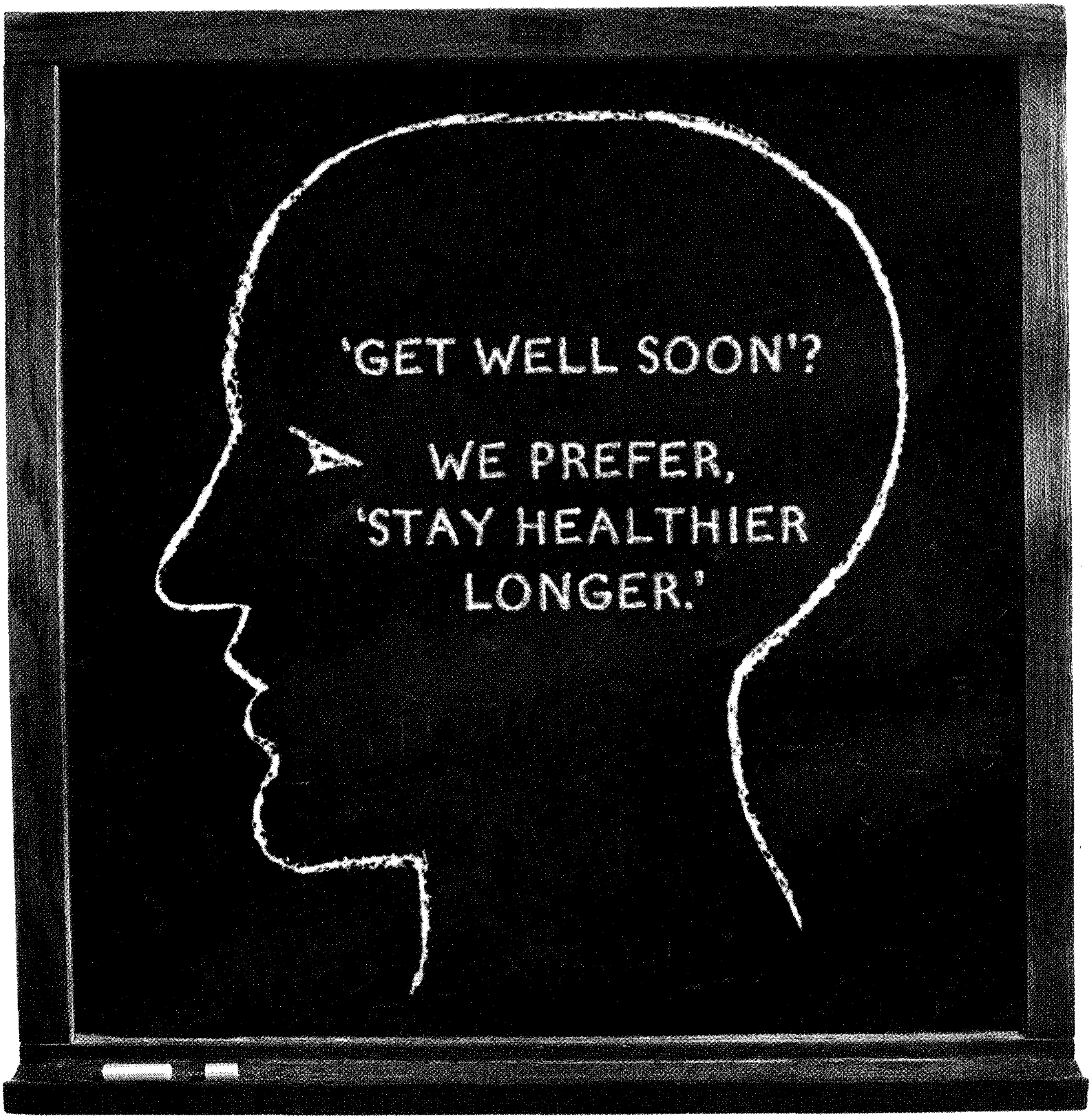

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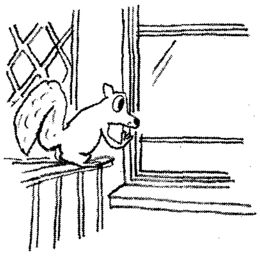
was waiting to be found. I walked through each room, calling his name. At last I found him, crumpled at the foot of the basement stairs. The lights were off. He'd stumbled, or, more likely, thrown himself down on purpose. He moaned a bit as I called the ambulance. Then I crouched next to him, squeezing and straightening each limb, checking for breaks.

No, he didn't have a broken leg. But he was as brittle as dried sticks, and the fall had jolted him mentally. He went in and out of what was real, called for my mother. Because he's in good health he might live years, I was told, or only hours, because he is anxious and ready to die. No one could tell me much during the days that he was in the hospital, so I finally made the call. It was time to sell the house and put him in a safe place where he could talk to other old people and live more comfortably, where he could perhaps improve.



"It's all right," I said. His eyes were empty, and his pupils had dilated until it seemed as if I were staring directly into the blackness of his mind.

I called a real-estate agent and made the arrangements. A van from the Pluto Retirement Home came to the hospital, and I rode along with a brown leather suitcase of his things. All the way there, he would not speak. As I was settling him into his room, he suddenly barked, "This is not what I had in mind!" He looked at the tray of pudding in front of him with contempt. Sipped a little coffee and said, again, "I tell you, this is not what I had in mind."

It was surprising how quickly he got used to the place. Over the next couple of months, he made a crony of his roommate and began to join the others, playing cards and watching his favorite shows on television. He even gained a few pounds, and got a new pair of pants and a haircut from the stylist who donated her time every week. I had to say that my father looked good, that the decision had been the right one. I had forgotten how social he was before my mother died.

But the house was not selling, although I had already dropped the price.

"Nobody with the income level that we need is moving here," the real-estate agent told me. "The doctors, lawyers, and so on, they all build new at the edge of town. We do have one interested party, but he's talking about demolition."

I knew. That he would want the house had, of course, occurred to me.

"Ted Bursap," the agent said, nodding. "He'll give you your asking price."

"The teardown king. I don't think so."

"Well." The agent shrugged. "At least we've got him in our back pocket."

"Yeah, sit on him! William Jennings Bryan stayed in this house! The windows were made out East and shipped here in huge sawdust crates. The interior moldings and the woodwork are mahogany, the library panels—"

"You're real attached, I know."

I *was* too attached to give the house up—it was true. It was all we had ever had. My salary was just enough to maintain us and keep the house in shape; even so, I had to do most of the repairs myself and had let the back wall go to the bees. I knew that they were in there, but they were part of things and did no harm. All winter, it was quiet as they slept. Their hum in the spring made the house awaken. All summer, the wall had vibrated with their sensuous life. I could not abandon the house or them.

I finished my law degree as I was waiting for the house to sell, and I decided to take the state bar exam. Perhaps I'd be able to get a homeowner's loan and pay it off once I'd hung out my shingle. In the evenings, I sat on the back porch studying like mad, listening to the bees gather the last sweetness before going to sleep. Later, I sat in the panelled library, appreciating the stillness and the clean odor of the swept and dusted rooms. I thought of how nice it would be to live there with C. I imagined it; I got lost in imagining it. I dreamed it when I fell asleep in my chair. All of a sudden I woke in blackness, alive to desolate knowledge. In that moment, I knew what those who kill themselves for love know, I saw what passed before the eyes of dying men who'd fought idiotic duels: I had wasted my life on a woman. All I had was this house. I stumbled from my chair into the kitchen and called the real-estate agent.

"O.K.," I told him. "Sell the place to Ted."

Not two days later, I put all that my parents and I had ever owned into storage, and I moved out of the house and into a motel unit by the overpass. I heard that Ted had begun. I knew how he worked. His crew would dismantle the inside first, prying off the old bead board in the pantry, yanking out light fixtures, chipping the shadowy gold tiles from around the fireplace, disassembling the elegant staircase, packing up the stained glass. Once the inside was gutted, Ted would rent a giant machine with a great toothed bucket that he used to claw the shell of lath and plaster to splinters.

I sat in my room at the Bluebird, trying to read. I was scheduled to take the bar that week, but I couldn't concentrate. It was as though the house were calling out to me, telling me that it loved me, that its destruction was a cruel and unnecessary adjunct to my decision to break things off with C. I couldn't see what was happening to the house, but I could feel what Ted was doing as though it were happening to me. My motel room, so shabby with its faded wallpaper of fluttering swallows, the sagging mattress on its rickety bed, its orange-streaked sink, and, worst of all—an attempt at cheer—a paper bluebird in a glassless frame, only filled me with dread. I could feel myself chopped into, gutted, chipped out, destroyed. Finally, on the third day, I decided to act.

I left the Bluebird and walked in the warm summer air to C.'s house. For the first time, I went in through the front door, the office door, without knocking. Her receptionist told me that she was busy with a patient, and squawked when I walked right past her into the examining room, which was empty. I shut that door and walked through to the back, into the kitchen, where I surprised her as she was loading a brand-new dishwasher. She had shed her white coat and was wearing a light cotton sweater the color of cantaloupe. Her pants were honeydew green.

We stared at each other, and the sun went behind a cloud. The light in the kitchen changed from amber to gray. Her clothes deepened in color to rusted iron and bitter sage.

"Did Ted tell you that I sold him my house?"

From the look of shock on her face, I knew that he hadn't, and I also knew that she understood immediately what had happened.

"Is he . . ."

"Of course."

"I'll stop him!"

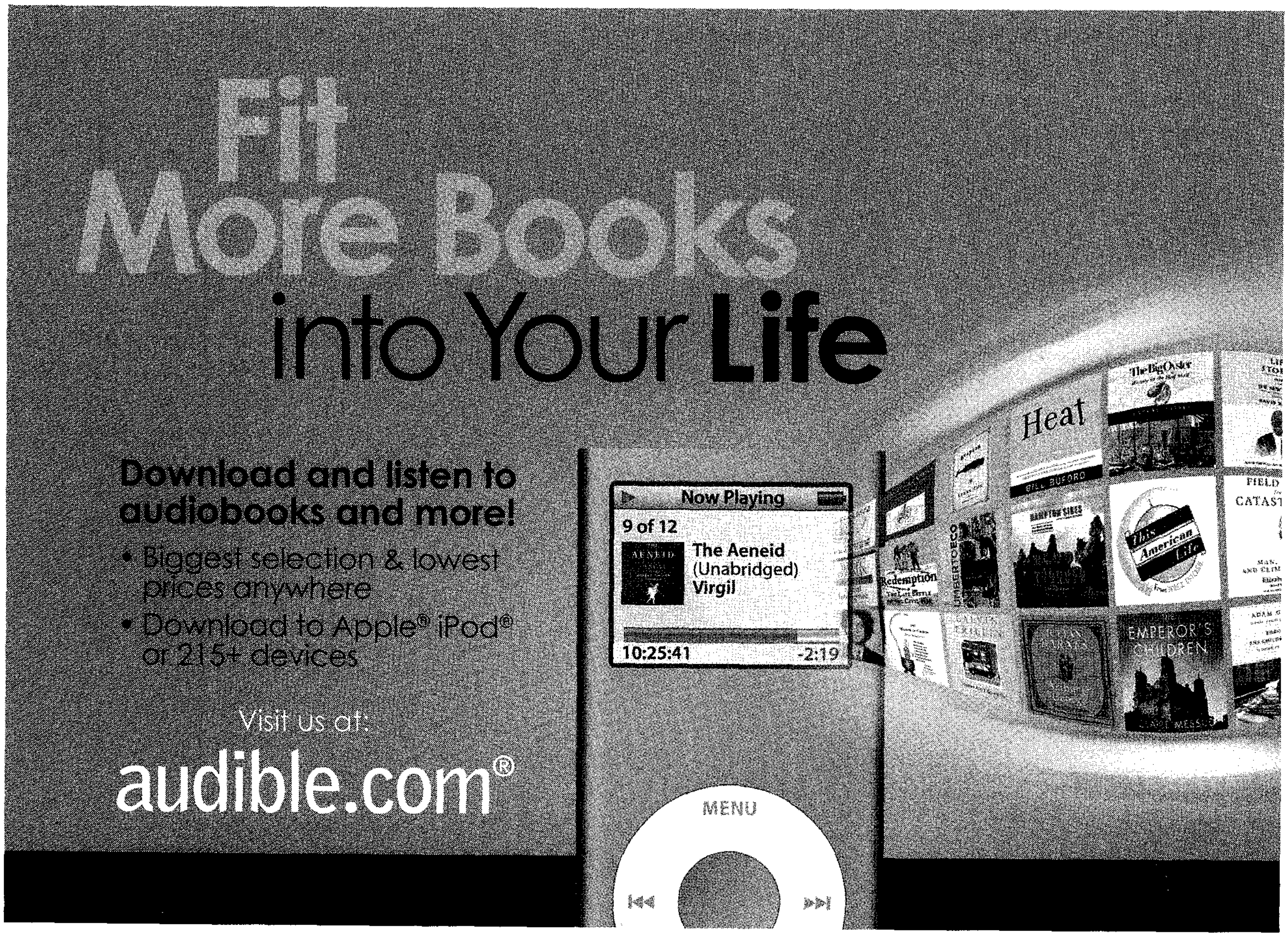
"Just let him."

"Just let him?"

"Pack your stuff," I said. "We'll go now. Our ages won't be an issue in the city, and you can start a new practice. Leave Ted the house. Let's go."

Behind her, the dishwasher swished on, the water purred in and heated up. She turned away from me and faced the counter.

"I forgot to put in the cups," she said.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A cloud of steam shot out as she opened the door to put in two coffee mugs, but when she closed it and looked at me I loved her again and I could not give her up.

"Buy my house from Ted. I'll pay you back, and we can live there."

"Is he working over there now?"

"Yes."

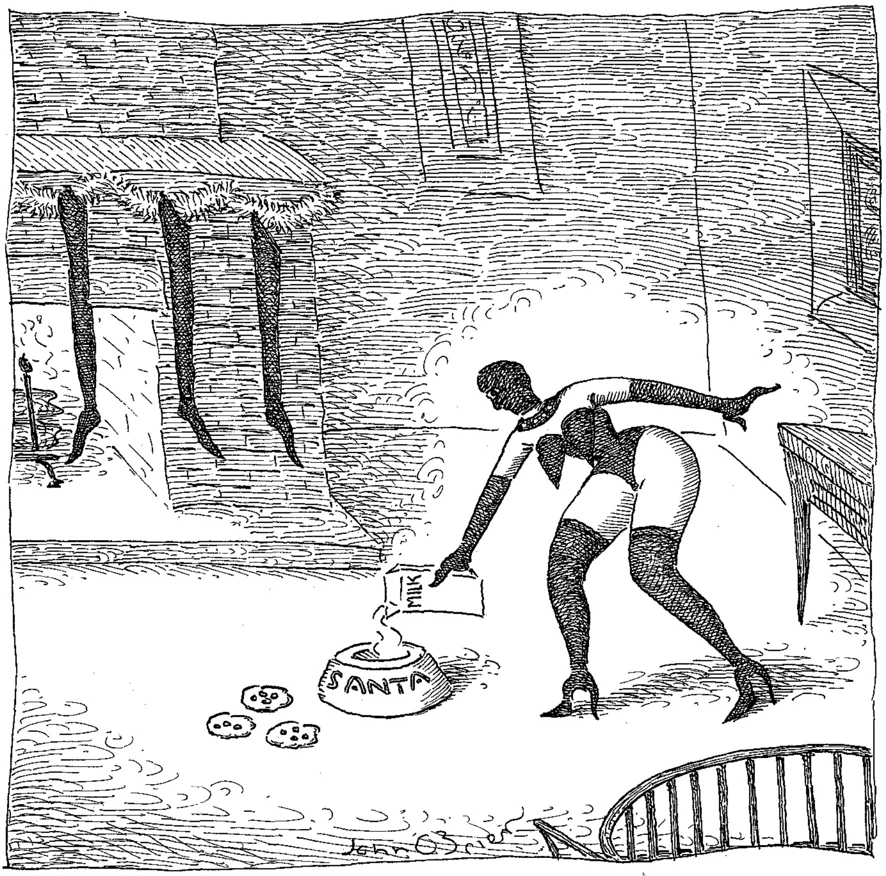
She wiped her hands carefully, the way doctors do.

What had she decided? She walked out the front door, and I followed her. The walk to my house was about a mile, and this was the first time that we had ever been seen in public together, which, for a moment, made me happy. And then, when we were almost at the house, I understood that the fact that she'd allowed herself to be seen in public with me meant that our love was over for good.

When we arrived, I saw that one crew was pulling out the front-porch columns and another had started work on the rear wall of the house. Ted was in the back, in the gardens, and I tried not to gasp at the way he had allowed the workers to trample the pansies, the tiny buds of portulaca, and the new clumps of sedum into the mulched ground. The bees were everywhere, and I felt a terrible guilt at having betrayed them. I apologized in a whisper as I watched Ted start up the machine that he would use to tear into the back wall.

C. shouted at him to quit. He turned off the engine, and she walked over and began to talk to him, her back to me. I could see his face, and I could see that although he was listening to what she was saying, he was actually looking at me. He looked at me as if I'd taken something from him. A hard look. He knew. On some level, perhaps not a conscious level but deep down, he knew, as a man knows. He turned from C. and re-started the machine—he rammed it forward. Its claw made a rip in the wall, and he backed up to make another, but before he could move forward again there was a roar even louder than the motor. A darkness poured from my house. A ripsaw whine. A sweetness exploded from the back wall, and Ted and C. were swarmed by the bees.

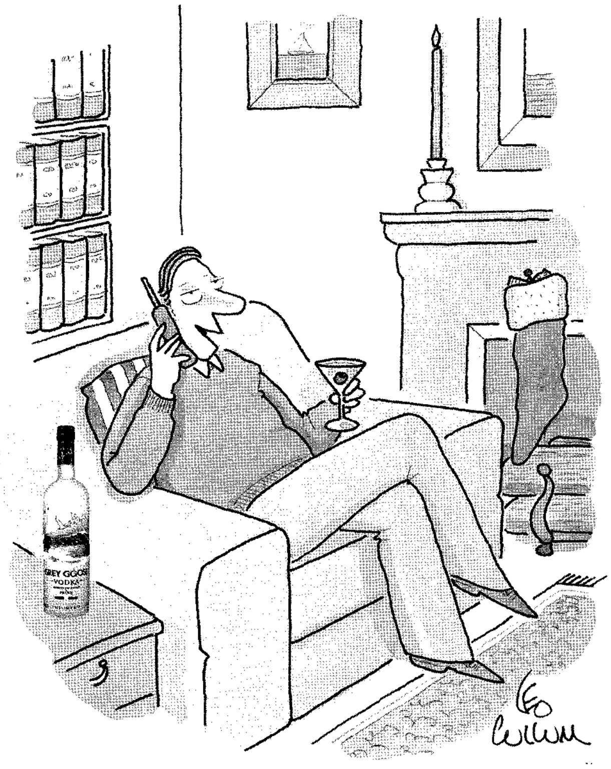
I was stung only twice. I think by young bees that did not know me.



I retrieved C. and carried her straight to the garage. When I went back for Ted, I saw that he had fallen under a moving cloud that had stung him into silence. Honey dripped from the gash he'd made in the clapboards; honey dripped from the backhoe. I walked over to him and watched the bees moving across his back. They seemed to have finished with their fury now; some flew off to repair the hive. As I waited for him to move, I reached out and tasted the honey from the claw of his machine. It was dark in the comb, and rich with the care I'd put into the flowers. I took a bigger piece of comb, brushed off a bee or two, and stuffed the dripping wax into my mouth. C., who had come to the door of the garage, saw me do this. She said later that it was the most cold-blooded act she'd ever witnessed—me eating honey while Ted lay unconscious beneath the moving bees.

Although it seemed to me that my pause had been thoughtful, not malicious, it was what made her allow Ted to continue with his teardown once he had recovered from the attack. The strange thing is that although he had survived an uncountable number of stings that day, one single bee did him in about a year later. His throat closed, and he was gone before he could even shout for help.

I passed the bar and entered a practice in Grand Forks, but even though I constantly asked my father to join me, he insisted on remaining in Pluto. When I visited him on weekends, I stayed at the Bluebird, and I gradually got used to the shaky feel of existence in those rooms. On every visit, I'd fill my car with books and household goods until I'd emptied out the storage space. On those weekends, I'd also walk the town to stretch my legs, and when I did I'd invariably visit the empty lot where our house had stood. Ted had died before deciding what flimsy box to erect on the site, so the lot had gone to weeds. One day as I was standing there a car drove up and stopped. An aged woman in a baggy summer dress got out and began to walk toward me. Her dress, a lurid pink floral pattern, threw me off. As she drew near, I recognized C. She had



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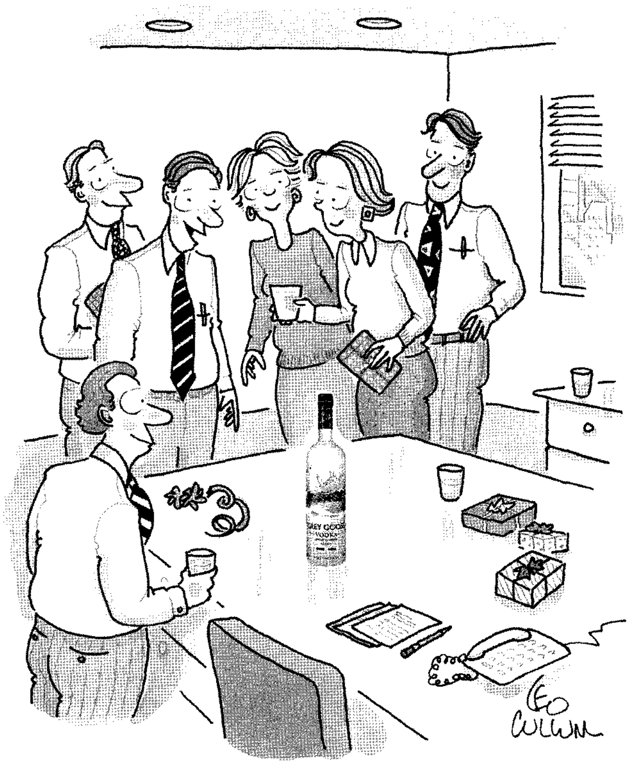

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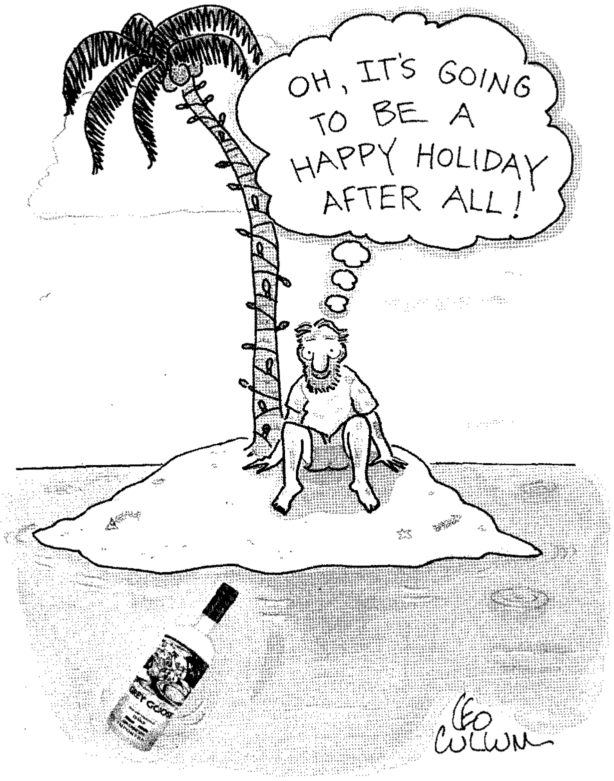
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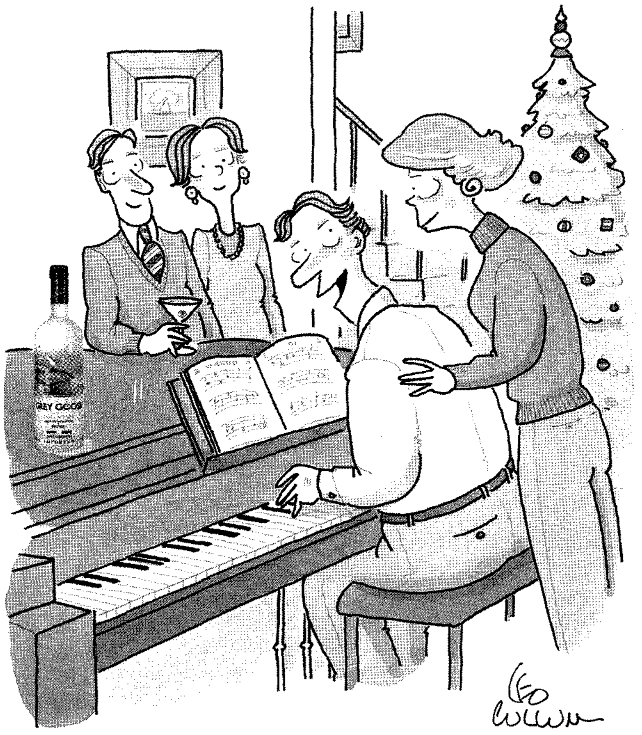

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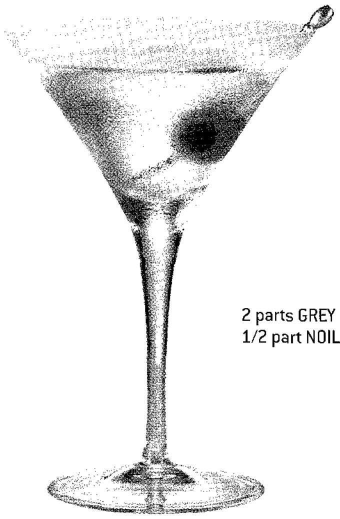
GREY GOOSE® Classic Martini Cocktail



2 parts GREY GOOSE® Vodka
1/2 part NOILLY PRAT® Dry vermouth

Fill a shaker with ice. Add NOILLY PRAT® Dry vermouth. Shake to coat ice and strain out. Add GREY GOOSE® Vodka and shake or stir well. Strain into a chilled martini glass. Present with an olive or lemon twist.

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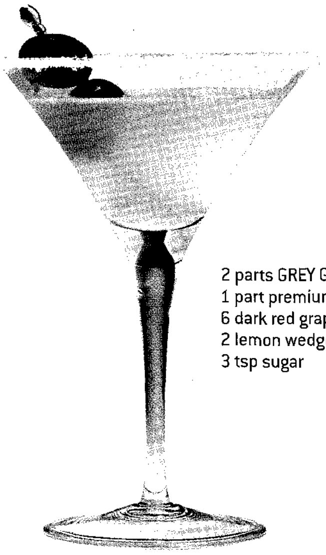
GREY GOOSE® Icon Martini



2 parts GREY GOOSE® Vodka
1 part premium orange-flavored liqueur
6 dark red grapes
2 lemon wedges
3 tsp sugar

Moisten the outside edge of a martini glass with a lemon wedge. Roll the rim of the glass in 2 teaspoons sugar. Place 4 grapes, lemon wedges and 1 teaspoon sugar in the bottom of a cocktail shaker. Mash the grapes well. Add GREY GOOSE® Vodka, premium orange-flavored liqueur and ice. Shake well. Strain into a martini glass. Present with remaining grapes.

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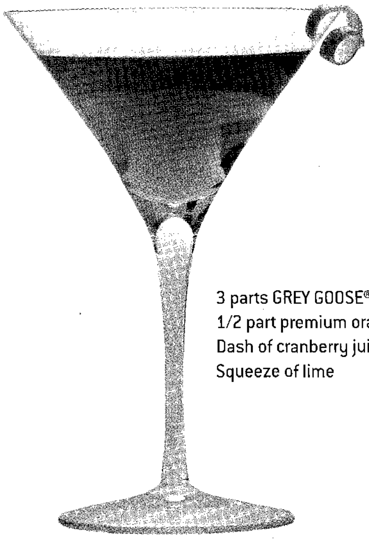
GREY GOOSE® L'Orange Cosmopolitan



3 parts GREY GOOSE® L'Orange Flavored Vodka
1/2 part premium orange-flavored liqueur
Dash of cranberry juice
Squeeze of lime

Pour ingredients in order listed into a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake and strain into a chilled martini glass. Present with a lime twist.

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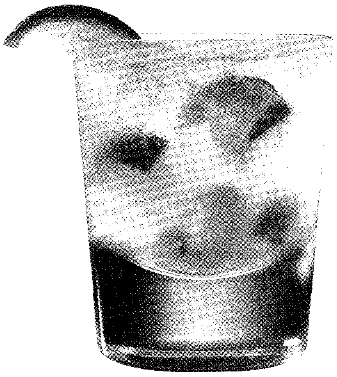
GREY GOOSE® Le Citron Caipiroska



1 part GREY GOOSE® Le Citron Flavored Vodka
1 small lime (cut into eighths)
1 part simple syrup or 1 tsp sugar

Place lime and syrup in the bottom of a shaker and muddle thoroughly. Add GREY GOOSE Le Citron and fill with ice. Shake vigorously and pour, ice and all, into a rocks glass. Top off with a splash of seltzer and additional ice if necessary.

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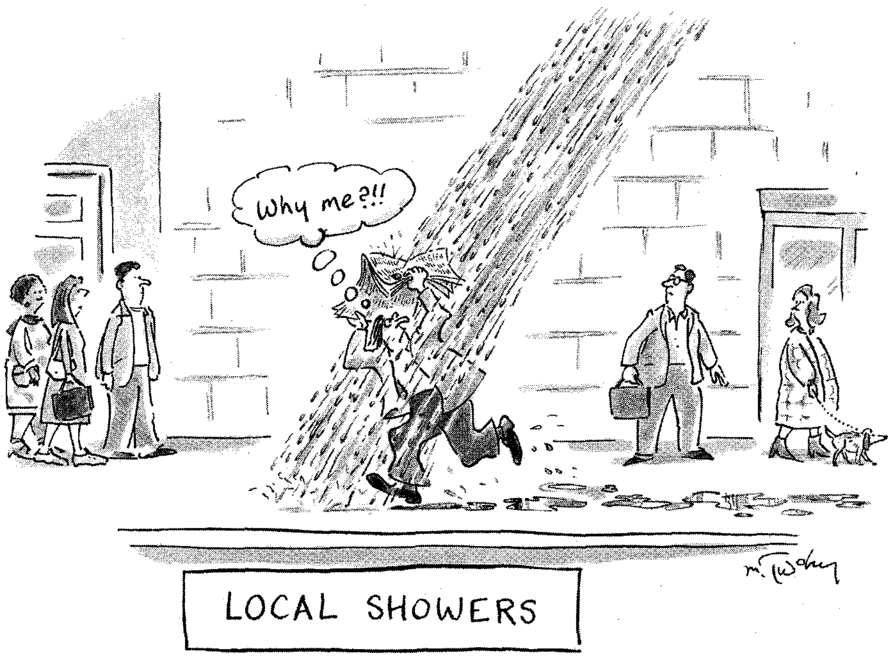

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never worn a flower print before, and she had let her hair go white. Also, she had developed the hunch of an elderly, soft-boned woman.

She looked pleased when she saw my face. "Didn't I tell you I would get old?"

"I didn't believe you," I said.

"You thought that I'd still be beautiful? I'd age gracefully?"

C. didn't seem concerned in the least at my awkwardness. Rather, it was what she'd been waiting for. It was why she'd got out of the car, perhaps even why she had let herself go. I became suspicious, suddenly, of her slumping walk, which seemed contrived.

"You did what you did," I said, my voice hard.

"I had to so you'd leave," she said.

Back in Grand Forks, I was seeing a woman who was more or less my age, a teacher with a young son, and I was working full time among the living. But even there I felt the pull of C.'s absence. Existence in the here and now only made me realize how much attraction the past exerts. I felt more present at that moment, in the dust, with C., and before the invisible house of my childhood, than I ever did back in Grand Forks, sitting in a Perkins restaurant and eating strawberry waffles with other lawyers.

I took a step toward C., but she turned and stomped back to her car. I watched her drive off, and then I walked up the limestone stairs and through the phantom oak-and-glass front door of my house. I paced the hall, entered the long rectangle of our dining room, rested a hand on the carved cherrywood mantel, then passed into the kitchen. The house was so real around me that I could smell the musty linen in the cedar closet, the gas from the leaky burner on the stove, the sharp tang of the geraniums that I had planted in clay pots. I lay down in the exact place where the living-room couch had been, pushed tight under the leaded-glass windows. I closed my eyes and it was all around me again. The bookshelves, the panelling, the soft slap of my father's cards on the table.

I could see from the house of my dark mind the alley, from the alley the street leading to the edge of town, its farthest boundary the lucid silence of the dead. Between the graves my path, and along that path her back door, her face, her timeless bed, and the lost architecture of her bones. I turned over and made myself comfortable in the wild crush of burdock. A bee or two hummed in the drowsy air. The swarm had left the rubble, and their new home stretched far beneath the earth. The bees were busy in the graveyard right now, filling the skulls with white combs and the coffins with sweet black honey. ♦

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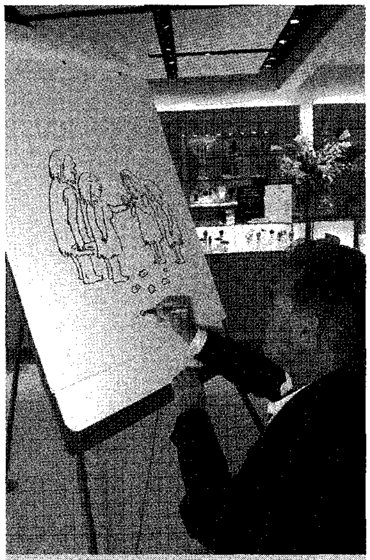

TIMELESS LAUGHTER

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The event took place on October 20th, and featured the *New Yorker* cartoonist Danny Shanahan, who created a custom cartoon and autographed complimentary copies of "The New Yorker Book of New York Cartoons." Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres were served while guests shopped and admired Movado's distinctive watches and elegant, modern jewelry designs.

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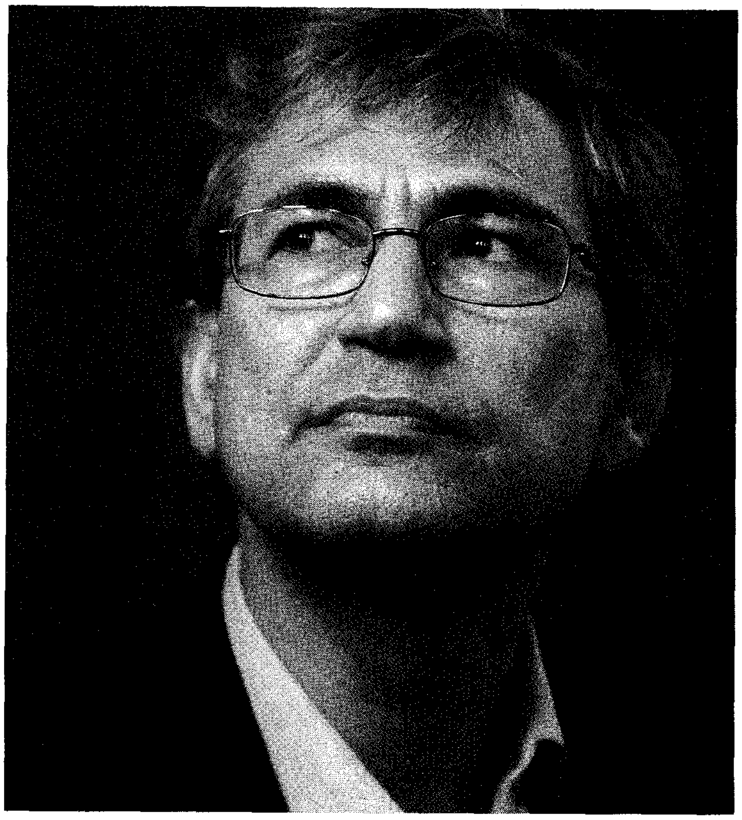
LIFE AND LETTERS

MY FATHER'S SUITCASE

The Nobel Lecture, 2006.

BY ORHAN PAMUK



SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES

Two years before my father died, he gave me a small suitcase filled with his manuscripts and notebooks. Assuming his usual jocular, mocking air, he told me that he wanted me to read them after he was gone, by which he meant after his death.

"Just take a look," he said, slightly embarrassed. "See if there's anything in there that you can use. Maybe after I'm gone you can make a selection and publish it."

We were in my study, surrounded by books. My father was searching for a place to set down the suitcase, wandering around like a man who wished to rid himself of a painful burden. In the end, he deposited it quietly, unobtrusively, in a corner. It was a shaming moment that neither of us ever quite forgot, but once it had passed and we had gone back to our usual roles, taking life lightly, we relaxed. We talked as we always did—about trivial, everyday things, and Turkey's never-ending political troubles, and my father's mostly failed business ventures—without feeling too much sorrow.

For several days after that, I walked back and forth past the suitcase without ever actually touching it. I was already familiar with this small black leather case, with a lock and rounded corners. When I was a child, my father had taken it with him on short trips and had sometimes used it to carry documents to work. Whenever he came home from a trip, I'd rush to open this little suitcase and rummage through his things, savoring the scent of cologne and foreign countries. The suitcase was a friend, a powerful reminder of my past, but now I couldn't even touch it. Why? No doubt because of the mysterious weight of its contents.

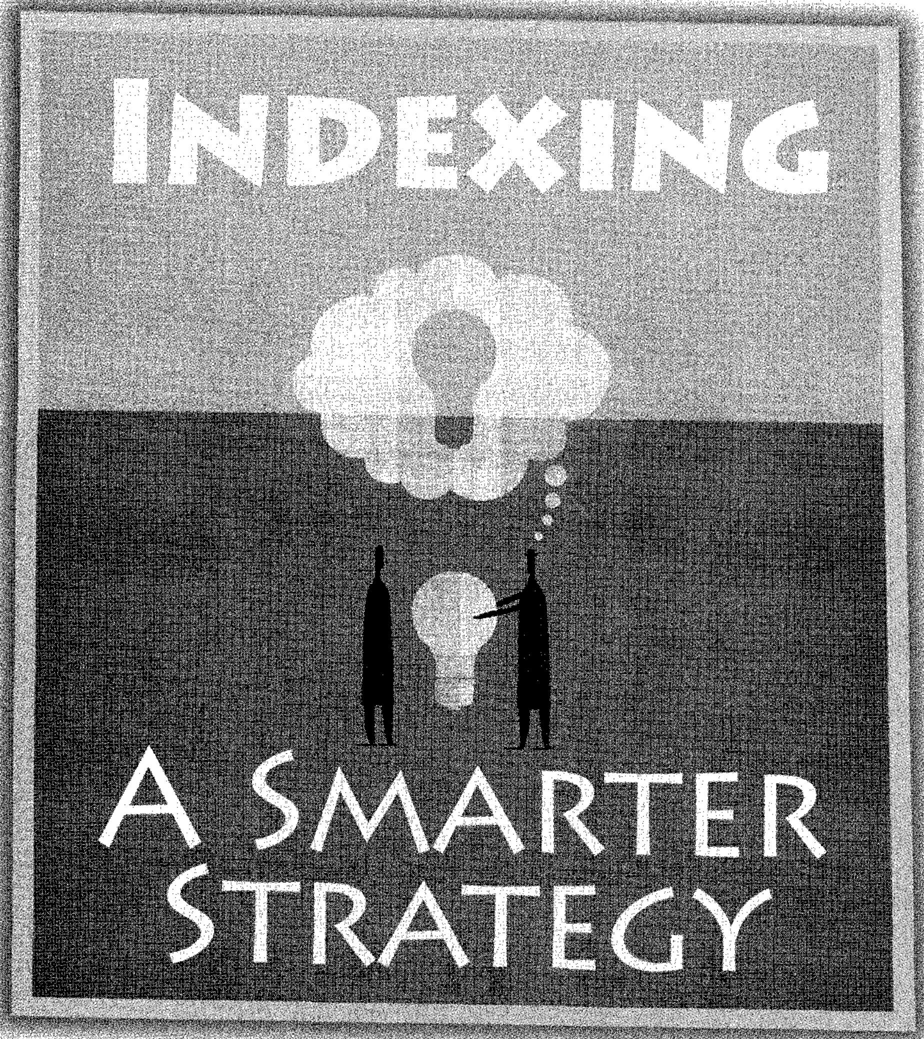
I am now going to speak of the meaning of that weight: that weight is what a person creates when he shuts himself up in a room and sits down at a table or retires to a corner to express his thoughts—that is, the weight of literature.

When I did finally touch my father's suitcase, I still could not bring myself to open it. But I knew what was inside some of the notebooks it held. I had seen my father writing in them. My father had a large library. In his youth, in the late nineteen-forties, he had wanted to be an Istanbul poet, and had translated Valéry into Turkish, but he had not wanted to live the sort of life that came with writing poetry in a poor country where there were few readers. My father's father—my grandfather—was a wealthy businessman, and my father had led a comfortable life as a child and a young man; he had no wish to endure hardship for the sake of literature, for writing. He loved life with all its beauties: this I understood.

The first thing that kept me away from my father's suitcase was, of course, a fear that I might not like what I read. Because my father understood this, too, he had taken the precaution of acting as if he did not take the contents of the case seriously. By this time, I had been working as a writer for twenty-five years, and his failure to take literature seriously pained me. But that was not what worried me most: my real fear—the crucial thing that I did not wish to discover—was that my father might be a good writer. If true and great literature emerged from my father's suitcase, I would have to acknowledge that inside my father there existed a man who was entirely different from the one I knew. This was a frightening possibility. Even at my advanced age, I wanted my father to be my father and my father only—not a writer.

A writer is someone who spends years patiently trying to discover the second being inside him, and the world that makes him who he is. When I speak

Pamuk in New York City, October 12, 2006.



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of writing, the image that comes first to my mind is not a novel, a poem, or a literary tradition; it is the person who shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and, alone, turns inward. Amid his shadows, he builds a new world with words. This man—or this woman—may use a typewriter, or profit from the ease of a computer, or write with a pen on paper, as I do. As he writes, he may drink tea or coffee, or smoke cigarettes. From time to time, he may rise from his table to look out the window at the children playing in the street, or, if he is lucky, at trees and a view, or even at a black wall. He may write poems, or plays, or novels, as I do. But all these differences arise only after the crucial task is complete—after he has sat down at the table and patiently turned inward. To write is to transform that inward gaze into words, to study the worlds into which we pass when we retire into ourselves, and to do so with patience, obstinacy, and joy.

As I sit at my table, for days, months, years, slowly adding words to empty pages, I feel as if I were bringing into being that other person inside me, in the same way that one might build a bridge or a dome, stone by stone. As we hold words in our hands, like stones, sensing the ways in which each is connected to the others, looking at them sometimes

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They're poisoning the atmosphere
now you and I've split
because they're trying to get something clear.
The mistletoe puts up its mitts

now you and I've split.
The black oaks jostle
and the mistletoe puts up its mitts
to vie for the sweet-throated throstle

where the black oaks jostle
over a back fence
and vie for the sweet-throated throstle,
seeming no less tense

over a back fence
than the chestnuts dishing the dirt,
seeming no less tense
than so many introverts,

than the chestnuts dishing the dirt
down by the water cooler.
Like so many introverts,
like all the other carpoolers

down by the water cooler,
they cough up their lungs.
Like all those other carpoolers,
the maples wag their tongues

and cough up their lungs
because they're trying to get something clear.
The maples wag their tongues.
They're poisoning the atmosphere.

—*Paul Muldoon*

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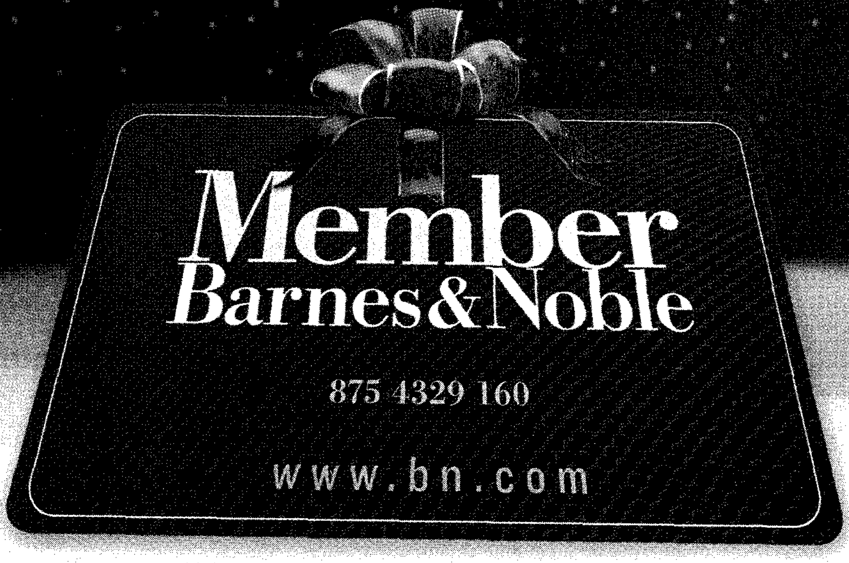

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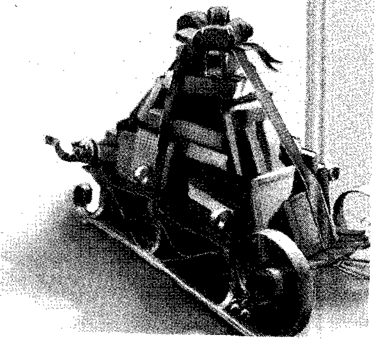

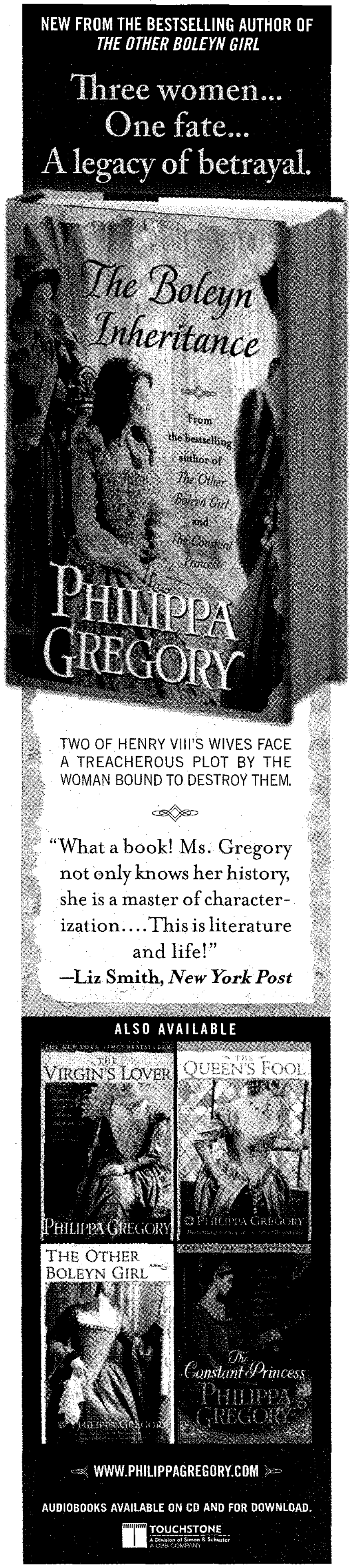

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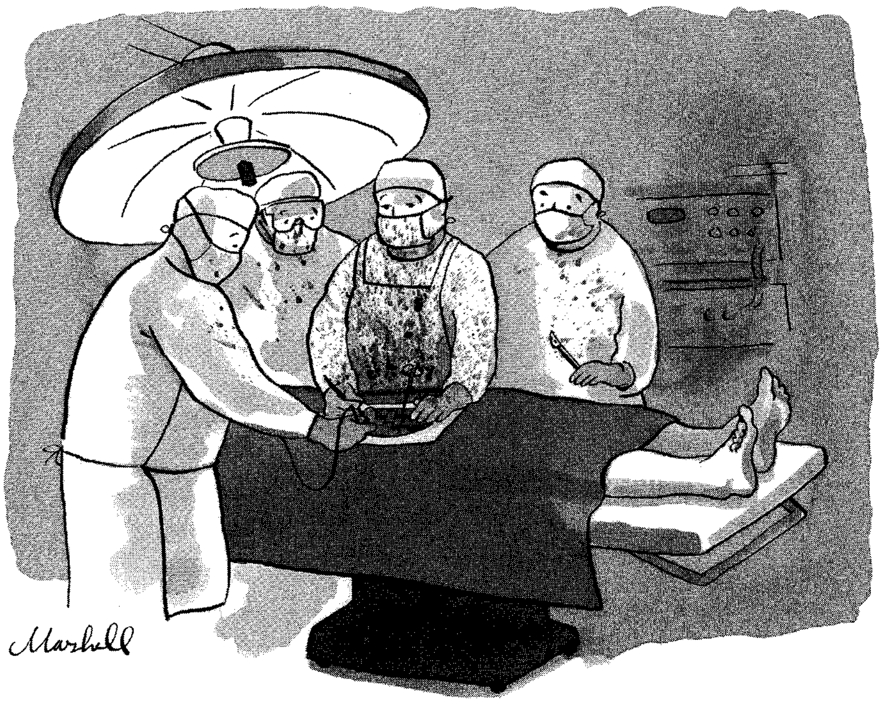
from afar, sometimes from very close, caressing them with our fingers and the tips of our pens, weighing them, moving them around, year in and year out, patiently and hopefully, we create new worlds.

The writer's secret is not inspiration—for it is never clear where that comes from—but stubbornness, endurance. The lovely Turkish expression "to dig a well with a needle" seems to me to have been invented with writers in mind. In the old stories, I love the patience of Ferhat, who digs through mountains for his love—and I understand it, too. When I wrote, in my novel "My Name Is Red," about the old Persian miniaturists who drew the same horse with the same passion for years and years, memorizing each stroke, until they could re-create that beautiful horse even with their eyes closed, I knew that I was talking about the writing profession, and about my own life. If a writer is to tell his own story—to tell it slowly, and as if it were a story about other people—if he is to feel the power of the story rise up inside him, if he is to sit down at a table and give himself over to this art, this craft, he must first be given some hope. The angel of inspiration (who pays regular visits to some and rarely calls on others) favors the hopeful and the confident, and it is when a writer feels most lonely, when he feels most doubtful about his efforts, his dreams, and the value of his writing, when he thinks that his story is only *his* story—it is at such moments that the angel chooses to reveal to him the images and dreams that will draw out the world he wishes to build. If I think back on the books to which I have devoted my life, I am most surprised by those moments when I felt as if the sentences and pages that made me ecstatically happy came not from my own imagination but from another power, which had found them and generously presented them to me.

I was afraid of opening my father's suitcase and reading his notebooks because I knew that he would never have tolerated the difficulties that I had tolerated, that it was not solitude he loved but mixing with friends, crowds, company. Still, later my thoughts took a different turn. These dreams of renunciation and patience, it occurred to me, were prejudices that I had derived from my own life and my own experience as a writer. There were plenty of brilliant writers who wrote amid crowds and family, in the glow of company and happy chatter. In addition, even my father had, at some point, tired of the monotony of family life and left for Paris,

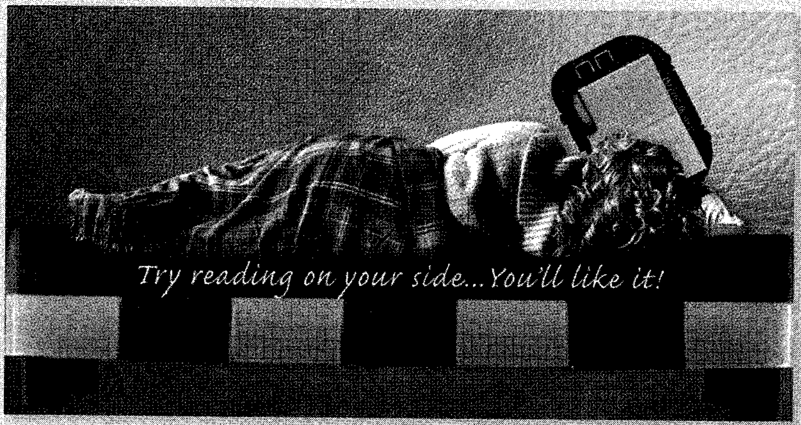


"God, this is going to be all over YouTube."

where—like so many writers—he had sat in a hotel room filling notebooks. I knew that some of those very notebooks were in the suitcase, because, during the years before he brought me the case, he had finally begun to talk about that period in his life. He had spoken about those years when I was a child, but he had never discussed his vulnerabilities, his dreams of becoming a writer, or the questions of identity that had plagued him in his Paris hotel room. He'd spoken instead of the times he'd seen Sartre on the sidewalks of Paris, of the books he'd read and the films he'd gone to, all with the elated sincerity of someone imparting important news.

When I became a writer, I knew that it was partly thanks to the fact that I had a father who spoke of world writers much more than he ever spoke of pashas or great religious leaders. So perhaps, I told myself, I would have to read my father's notebooks with my gratitude in mind, remembering, too, how indebted I was to his large library. I would have to remember that, when he was living with us, my father, like me, enjoyed being alone with his books and his thoughts—and not pay too much attention to the literary quality of his writing. But as I gazed so anxiously at the suitcase he had bequeathed to me I also felt that this was the very thing I would not be able to do.

Sometimes my father would stretch out on a divan, abandon the book or the magazine in his hand, and drift off into a dream, losing himself for the longest time. When I saw this expression on his face, which was so different from the one he wore for the joking, teasing, and bickering of family life, when I saw the first signs of an inward gaze, I would understand, with trepidation, that he was discontented. Now, many years later, I understand that this discontent is the basic trait that turns a person into a writer. Patience and toil are not enough: first, we must feel compelled to escape crowds, company, the stuff of ordinary life, and shut ourselves up in a room. The precursor of this sort of independent writer—one who reads to his heart's content, who, by listening only to the voice of his own conscience, disputes others' words, and who, by entering into conversation with his books, develops his own



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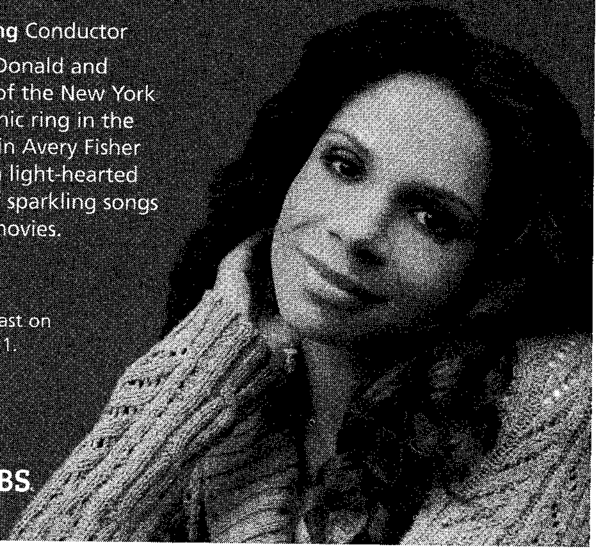
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"But in my fantasy business league I'm making millions."

thoughts and his own world—was surely Montaigne, in the earliest days of modern literature. Montaigne was a writer to whom my father returned often, a writer he recommended to me. I would like to see myself as belonging to the tradition of writers who—wherever they are in the world, East or West—cut themselves off from society and shut themselves up in their rooms with their books; this is the starting point of true literature.

But once we have shut ourselves away we soon discover that we are not as alone as we thought. We are in the company of the words of those who came before us, of other people's stories, other people's books—the thing we call tradition. I believe literature to be the most valuable tool that humanity has found in its quest to understand itself. Societies, tribes, and peoples grow more intelligent, richer, and more advanced as they pay attention to the troubled words of their authors—and, as we all know, the burning of books and the denigration of writers are both signs that dark and improvident times are upon us. But literature is never just a national concern. The writer who shuts himself up in a room and goes on a journey inside himself will, over the years, discover literature's eternal rule: he must have the artistry to tell his own stories as if they were other people's stories, and to tell other people's stories as if they were his own, for that is what literature is.

My father had a good library, fifteen hundred volumes in all—more than enough for a writer. By the age of twenty-two, I had perhaps not read them all, but I was familiar with each book. I knew which were important, which were light and easy reading, which were classics, which an essential part of any education, which forgettable but amusing accounts of local history, and which French authors my father rated highly. Sometimes I would look at this library from a distance and imagine that one day, in a different house, I would build my own library, an even better library—build myself a world. When I looked at my father's library from afar, it seemed to me to be a small picture of the real world. But this was a world seen from our own corner, from Istanbul. My father had built his library mostly on his trips abroad, with books from Paris and America, but he had also stocked it with books bought at Istanbul's foreign-language bookshops in the forties and fifties.

In the seventies, I did begin, somewhat ambitiously, to build my own library. I had not quite decided to become a writer; as I related in my book "Istanbul," I had come to suspect that I would not be a painter, as I had hoped, but I was not yet sure what path my life would take. There was inside me a relentless curiosity, a hope-driven desire to read and learn, but at the same time I felt that my life was in some way lacking, that I would not be able to live like others. Part of this feeling was connected to what I felt when I gazed at my father's library: that I was living in the provinces, far from the center of things. This was a feeling I shared with everyone in Istanbul in those days. There was another reason for my anxiety: I knew only too well that I lived in a country that showed little interest in its artists—whether painters or writers—and offered them no hope. In the seventies, when I took the money my father gave me and greedily bought faded, dusty, dog-eared books from Istanbul's old booksellers, I was as affected by the pitiable state of these secondhand bookstores—and by the despairing dishevelment of the poor, bedraggled booksellers, who laid out their wares at roadsides, in mosque courtyards, and in the niches of crumbling walls—as I was by their books.

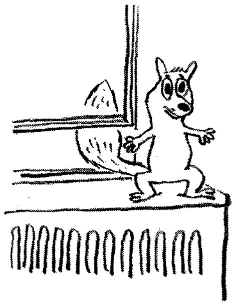
As for my place in the world: in life, as in literature, I felt, fundamentally, that I was not "at the center." At the center of the world, there was a life that was richer and more exciting than our own, and, like all of Istanbul, all of Turkey, I was outside it. In the same way, there was world literature, and its center was far away from me. Actually, what I had in mind then was Western, not world, literature, and we Turks were certainly outside it. My father's library was evidence of this. At one end of the room, there were Istanbul's books—our literature, our local world, in all its beloved detail—and at the other end were the books from this other, Western world, which bore no resemblance to ours, a lack of resemblance that caused us both pain and hope. To write, to read, was like leaving one world to find consolation in the otherness of another, in the strange and the wondrous. I felt that my father had read novels in order to escape his life and flee to the West—just as I did later.

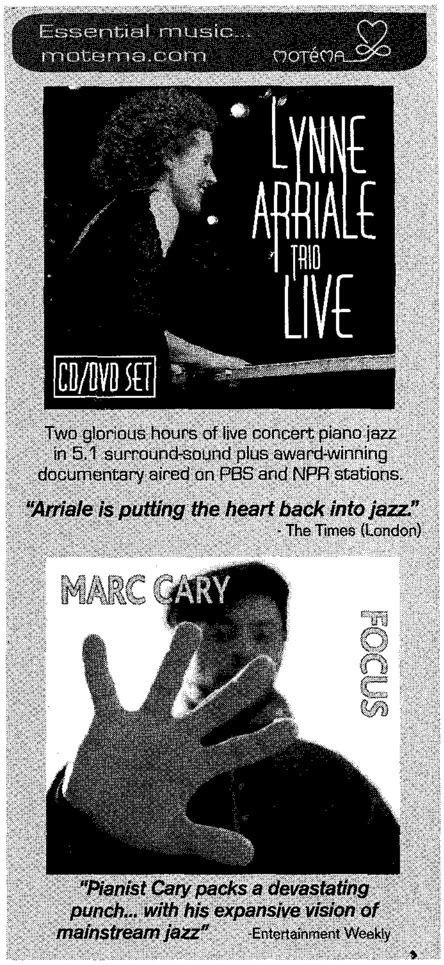
Books in general, it seemed to me in those days, were what we picked up to escape our own culture, which we found wanting. And it wasn't only by reading that we could leave our Istanbul lives and travel West; it was by writing, too. To fill those notebooks of his, my father had gone to Paris and shut himself up in a room, and then he had carried the notebooks back to Turkey. As I gazed at my father's suitcase, it seemed to me that this was part of what was causing me disquiet: after working in a room, trying to survive as a writer in Turkey for twenty-five years, I was galled to see my father hide his deep thoughts in this suitcase, to see him act as if writing were work that had to be done in secret, far from the eyes of society, the state, the people. Perhaps this was the main reason that I felt angry at my father for not taking literature as seriously as I did.

In fact, I was angry at my father because he had not led a life like mine—because he had never quarrelled with his life, and had spent it happily laughing with his friends and his loved ones. But part of me also knew that I was not so much "angry" as "jealous," that the second word was more accurate, and this, too, made me uneasy. I'd ask myself in a scornful, angry voice: What is happiness? Is happiness believing that you live a deep life in your lonely room? Or is happiness leading a comfortable life in society, believing in the same things as everyone else, or, at least, acting as if you did? Is it happiness or unhappiness to go through life writing in secret, while seeming to be in harmony with all that surrounds you?

But these were ill-tempered questions. Wherever had I got the idea that the most important measure of a good life was happiness? People, papers—everyone acted as if it were. Did this alone not suggest that it might be worth trying to find out if the opposite was true? After all, my father had run away from his family many times—how well did I know him, and how well could I say that I understood his disquiet?

So this was what was driving me when I first opened my father's suitcase: Did my father have a secret, an unhappiness in his life that I knew nothing about, something that he could endure only by pouring it into his writing? As soon as I opened the suitcase, I recalled its scent of travel and recognized several notebooks that my father had shown me years earlier, though without dwelling on them for long. Most of the notebooks I now took in my hands he had filled when he was in Paris as a young man. Although, like so many writers I admired—writers whose biographies I had read—I wished to know what my father had written, and what he had thought, when he was the age I was now, it did not take me long to realize that I would find nothing like that here. What disturbed me most was when, now and again, in my father's notebooks, I came upon a writerly voice. This was not my father's voice, I told myself; it wasn't authentic, or, at least, it didn't belong to the man I'd known as my father. Beneath my fear that my father might not have been my father when he wrote was a more profound fear: the fear that, deep inside, *I* was not authentic. If I found nothing good in my father's writing, if I found him to have been overly influenced by other writers, I would be plunged into the despair that had afflicted me so strongly when I was young, casting my life, my very being, my desire to write, and my work into question. During my first ten years as a writer, I had felt these anxi-





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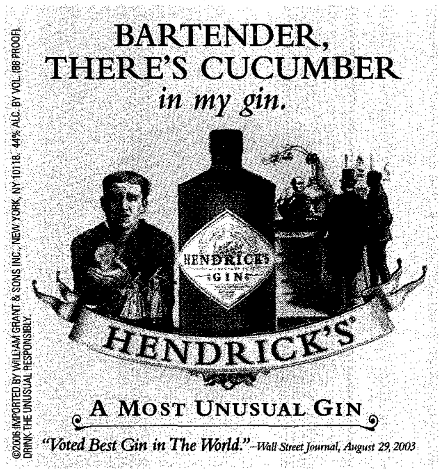

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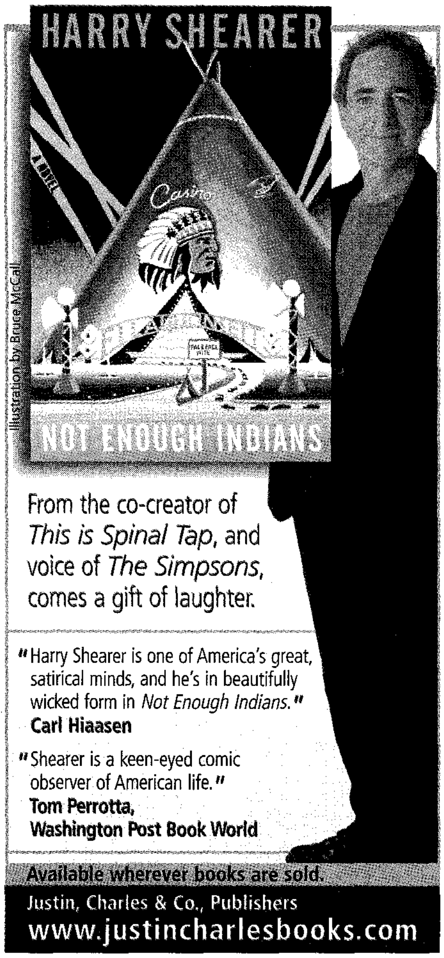
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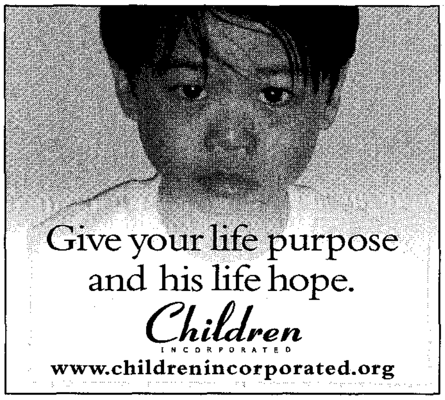
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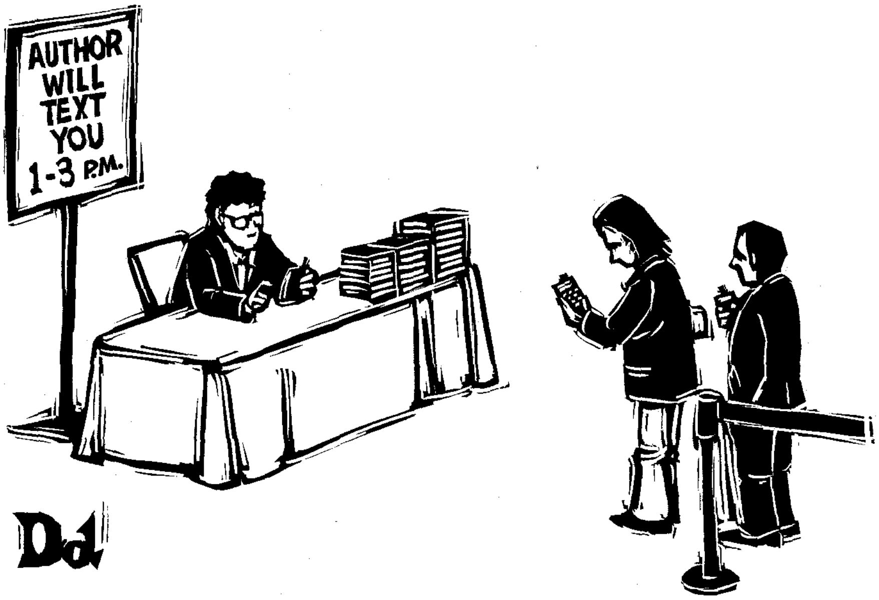
eties keenly, and, even as I battled them, I had feared that one day I would have to admit defeat—just as I had done with painting—and give up writing as well.

So these were the two things I felt as I closed my father's suitcase and put it away: a sense of being marooned in the provinces, and a fear that I lacked authenticity. For years, I had, in my reading and my writing, been discovering, studying, and deepening these emotions, in all their variety and their unintended consequences, their nerve endings, their triggers, and their many colors. Certainly my spirits had been jarred by the confusions, the sensitivities, and the fleeting pains that life and books had sprung on me, especially as a young man. But it was only by writing books that I came to a fuller understanding of the problems of authenticity (in "My Name Is Red" and "The Black Book") and the problems of life on the periphery (in "Snow" and "Istanbul"). For me, to be a writer is to acknowledge the secret wounds that we carry inside us, wounds so secret that we ourselves are barely aware of them, and to patiently explore them, know them, illuminate them, own them, and make them a conscious part of our spirit and our writing.

A writer talks of things that we all know but do not know that we know. To explore this knowledge, and to watch it grow, is a pleasurable thing; the reader visits a world that is at once familiar and miraculous. When a writer uses his secret wounds as his starting point, he is, whether he is aware of it or not, putting great faith in humanity. My confidence comes from the belief that all human beings resemble one another, that others carry wounds like mine—and that they will therefore understand. All true literature rises from this childish, hopeful certainty that we resemble one another. When a writer shuts himself up in a room for years on end, with this gesture he suggests a single humanity, a world without a center.

But, as can be seen from my father's suitcase and the pale colors of our lives in Istanbul, the world did have a center, and it was far away from us. I know from experience that the great majority of people on this earth live with the same feeling of inauthenticity and Chekhovian provinciality, and that many suffer from an even deeper sense of insufficiency, insecurity, and degradation than I do. Yes, the greatest dilemmas facing humanity are still landlessness, homelessness, and hunger . . . but today our televisions and newspapers tell us about these fundamental problems more quickly and more simply than literature ever could. What literature most needs to tell and to investigate now is humanity's basic fears: the fear of being left outside, the fear of counting for nothing, and the feeling of worthlessness that comes with such fears—the collective humiliations, vulnerabilities, slights, grievances, sensitivities, and imagined insults, and the na-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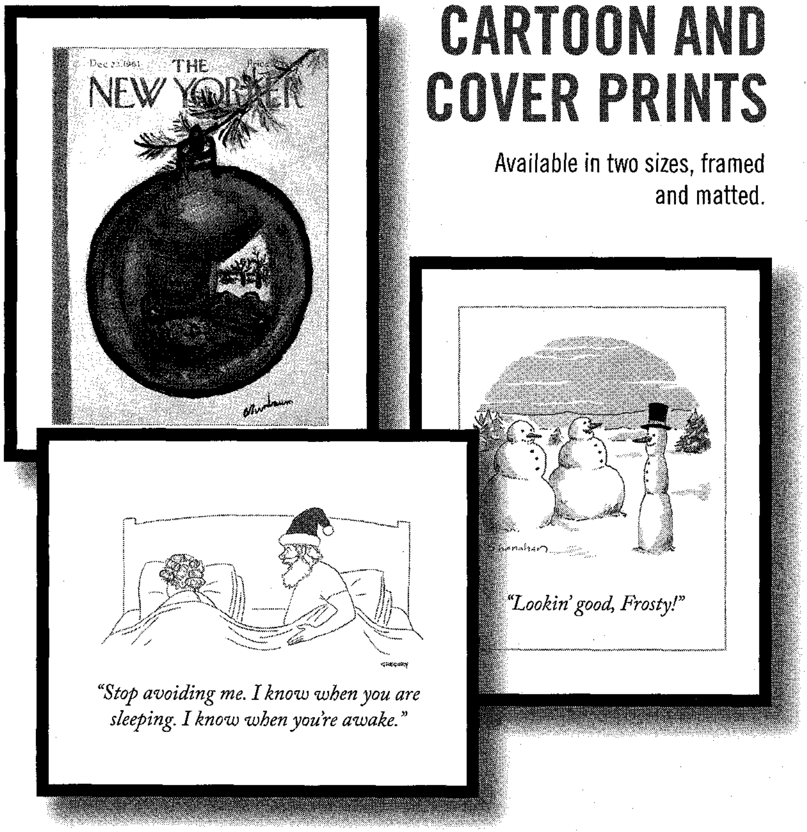
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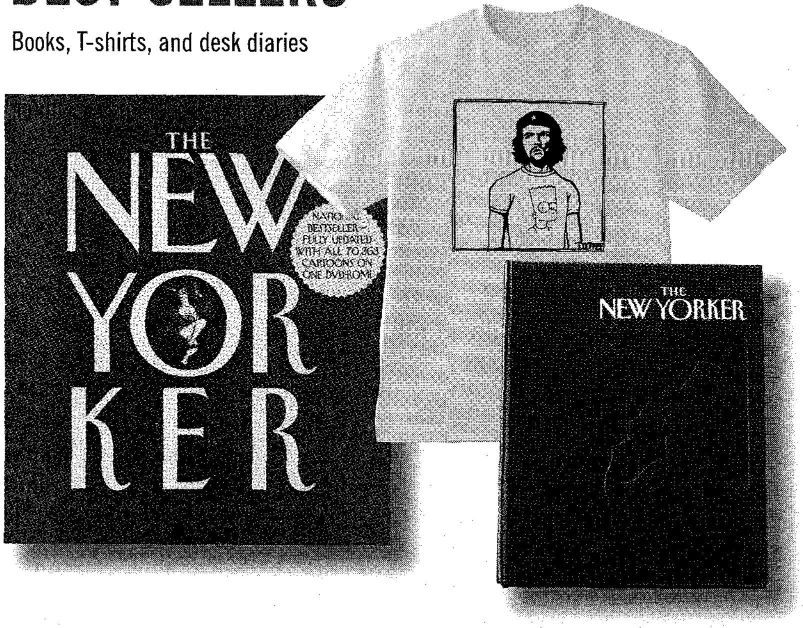
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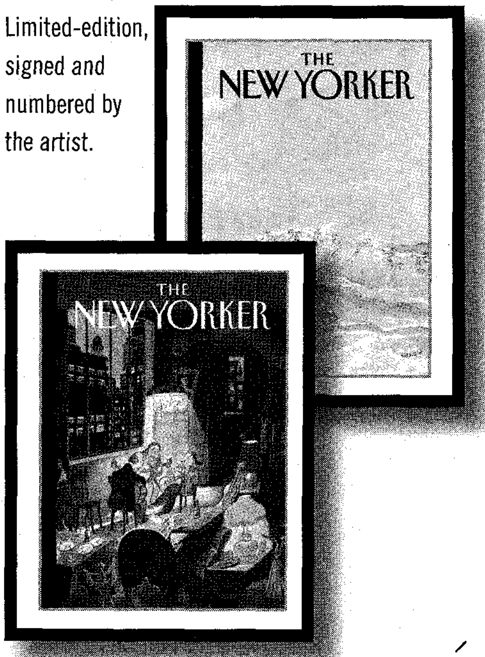
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THE JOURNEY TO THE OFFICE EACH DAY WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS OWN LITTLE PROBLEMS.

tionalist boasts and inflations that are their next of kin. . . . Whenever I am confronted by such sentiments, and by the irrational, overstated language in which they are usually expressed, I know that they touch on a darkness inside me. We have often witnessed peoples, societies, and nations outside the Western world—and I can identify with them easily—succumbing to fears that lead them to commit stupid acts. I also know that in the West—a world with which I can identify just as easily—nations and peoples that take an excessive pride in their wealth, and in their glory at having brought us the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modernism, have, from time to time, succumbed to a self-satisfaction that is almost as stupid.

So my father was not the only one: we all give too much importance to the idea of a world with a center. Whereas the impulse that compels us to shut ourselves up in our rooms to write for years on end is a faith in the opposite, the belief that one day our writings will be read and understood, because people the world over resemble one another. This, as I know from my own and my father's writing, is a troubled optimism, scarred by the anger of being consigned to the margins. The love and hate that Dostoyevsky felt toward the West all his life—I have felt this, too, on many occasions. But if I have grasped an essential truth, if I have cause for optimism, it is because I have travelled with this great writer through his love-hate relationship with the West and I have beheld the world that he built on the other side.

All writers who have devoted their lives to their work know this reality: whatever our original purpose, the world that we create after years and years of hopeful writing will, in the end, take us to other, very different places. It will take us far from the table at which we have worked in sadness or in anger; it will take us to the other side of that sadness and anger, into another world. Could my father not have reached such a world himself? Like the land that slowly begins to take shape, rising from the mist in its many colors like an island spied after a long sea journey, this other world enchants us. We are as beguiled as the Western travellers who voyaged from the south to behold Istanbul rising from the mist. At the end of a journey begun in hope and curiosity, there lies before us a city of mosques and minarets, a medley of houses, streets, hills, bridges, and slopes—an entire world. Seeing this world, we wish to enter it and lose ourselves in it, just as we might in a book. After sitting down to write because we felt provincial, excluded, marginalized, angry, or deeply melancholic, we have found an entire world beyond these sentiments.

What I feel now is the opposite of what I felt as a child and a young man: for me, the center of the world is Istanbul. This is not just because I have lived there all my life but because, for the past thirty-three years, I have been narrating its streets, its bridges, its people, its dogs, its houses, its mosques, its fountains, its strange heroes, its shops, its famous characters, its dark spots, its days, and its nights, making them a part of me, embracing them all. A point arrived when this world that I had made with my own hands, this world that existed only in my head, was more real to me than the city in which I actually lived. That was when all these people and streets, objects and buildings seemed to begin to talk among themselves, interacting in ways that I had not anticipated, as if they lived not just in my imagination or my books but for themselves. This world that I had created, like a man digging a well with a needle, unicef

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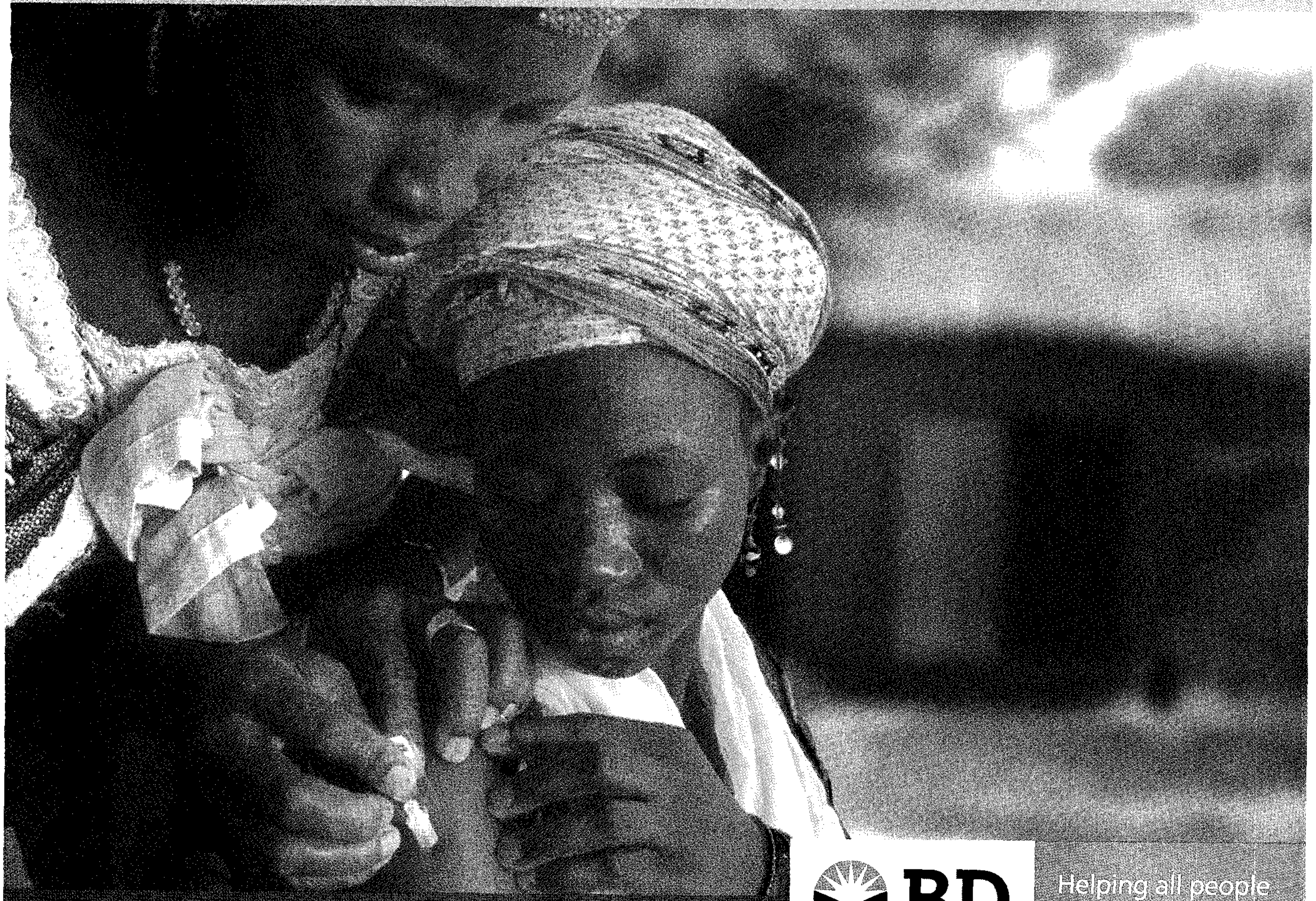

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[1] World Health Organization/UNICEF, 2002 data.

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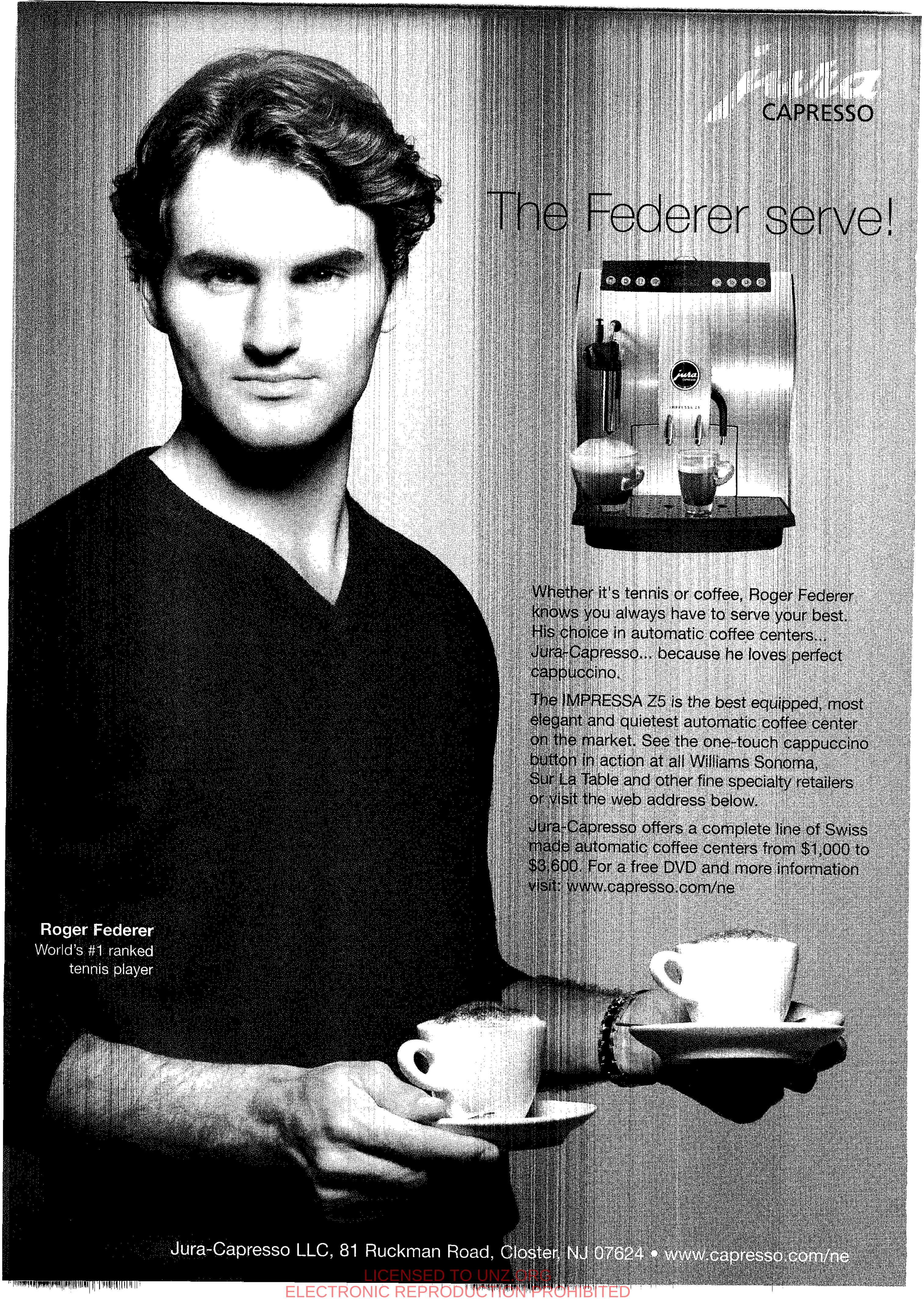

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then seemed truer than anything else.

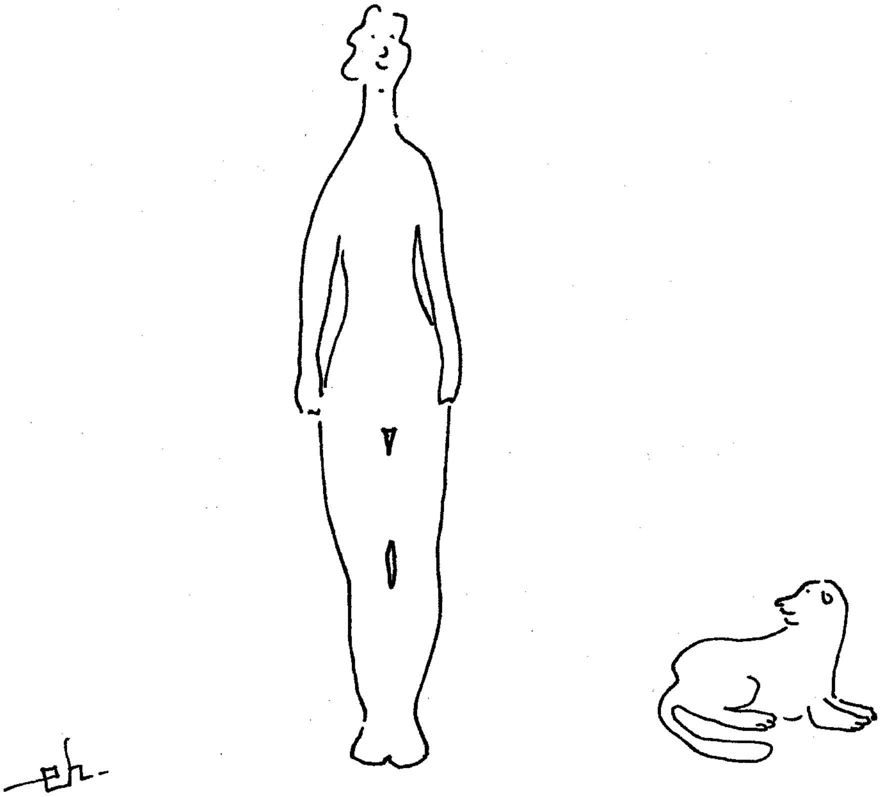
As I gazed at my father's suitcase, it occurred to me that he might also have discovered this kind of happiness in the years he spent writing. I should not prejudge him. I was so grateful to him, after all. He had never been a commanding, forbidding, overpowering, punishing, ordinary father. He had always left me free, always showed me the utmost respect. I had often thought that if I had, from time to time, been able to draw on my imagination, whether in freedom or in childishness, it was because, unlike so many of my friends from childhood and youth, I had no fear of my father. On some deeper level, I was able to become a writer because my father, in his youth, had also wished to be one. I would have to read him with tolerance—to seek to understand what he had written in those hotel rooms.

It was with these hopeful thoughts that I walked over to the suitcase, which was still sitting where my father had left it. Using all my will power, I read through a few manuscripts and notebooks. What had my father written about? I recall a few views from the windows of Paris hotels, a few poems, paradoxes, analyses. . . . As I write, I feel like someone who has just been in a traffic accident and is struggling to remember how it happened, while at the same time dreading the prospect of remembering too much. When I was a child, and my father and mother were on the brink of a quarrel—when they fell into one of their deadly silences—my father would turn on the radio, to change the mood, and the music would help us forget it all faster.

So let me change the mood with a few sweet words that will, I hope, serve as well as that music. The question we writers are asked most often, the favorite question, is: Why do you write? I write because I have an innate need to write. I write because I can't do normal work as other people do. I write because I want to read books like the ones I write. I write because I am angry at everyone. I write because I love sitting in a room all day writing. I write because I can partake of real life only by changing it. I write because I want others, the whole world, to know what sort of life we lived, and continue to live, in Istanbul, in Turkey. I write because I love the smell of paper, pen, and ink. I write because I believe in literature, in the art of the novel, more than I believe in anything else. I write because it is a habit, a passion. I write because I am afraid of being forgotten. I write because I like the glory and interest that writing brings. I write to be alone. Perhaps I write because I hope to understand why I am so very, very angry at everyone. I write because I like to be read. I write because once I have begun a novel, an essay, a page I want to finish it. I write because everyone expects me to write. I write because I have a childish belief in the immortality of libraries, and in the way my books sit on the shelf. I write because it is exciting to turn all life's beauties and riches into words. I write not to tell a story but to compose a story. I write because I wish to escape from the foreboding that there is a place I must go but—as in a dream—can't quite get to. I write because I have never managed to be happy. I write to be happy.

A week after he came to my office and left me his suitcase, my father paid me another visit; as always, he brought me a bar of chocolate (he had forgotten that I was forty-eight years old). As always, we chatted and laughed about life, politics, and family gossip. A moment arrived when my father's gaze drifted to the corner where he had left his suitcase, and he saw that I had moved it. We looked each other in the eye. There followed a pressing silence. I did not tell him that I had opened the suitcase and tried to read its contents; instead, I looked away. But he understood. Just as I understood that he had understood. Just as he understood that I had understood that he had understood. But all this understanding went only as far as it could go in a few seconds. Because my father was a happy, easygoing man who had faith in himself, he smiled at me the way he always did. And, as he left the house, he repeated all the lovely and encouraging things he always said to me, like a father.

As always, I watched him leave, envying his happiness, his carefree and unflappable temperament. But I remember that on that day there was also a flash of joy inside me that made me ashamed. It was prompted by the thought that maybe I wasn't as comfortable in life as he was, maybe I had not led as happy or footloose a life as he had, but at least I had devoted mine to writing. You understand . . . I was ashamed



"Everything about her spelled trouble, but it was dark, and I thought it spelled 'truffles.'"

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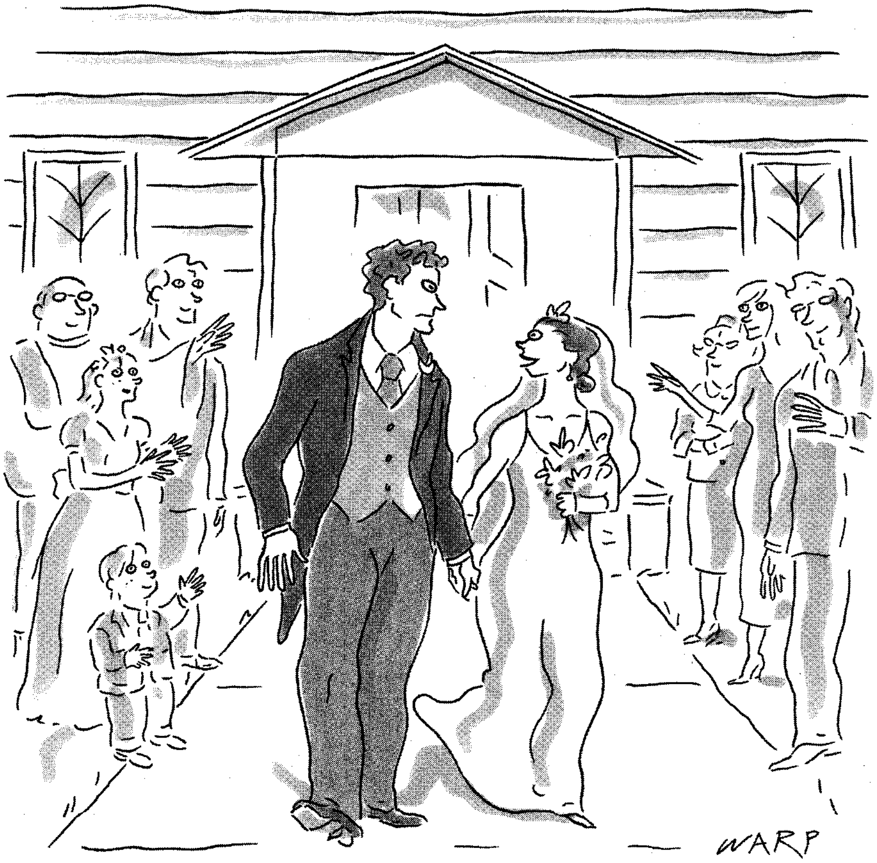

"Whew! At last, I can eat!"

• •

to be thinking such things at my father's expense—of all people, my father, who had never been a source of pain to me, who had left me free. All this should remind us that writing and literature are intimately linked to a void at the center of our lives, to our feelings of happiness and guilt.

But my story has a symmetry that immediately reminded me of something else that day, bringing with it an even deeper sense of guilt. Twenty-three years before my father left me his suitcase, and four years after I had decided, at the age of twenty-two, to become a novelist, and, abandoning all else, shut myself up in a room, I finished my first novel, "Cevdet Bey and His Sons." With trembling hands, I gave my father a typescript of the still unpublished novel, so that he could read it and tell me what he thought. I did this not only because I had confidence in his taste and his intellect; his opinion was very important to me because, unlike my mother, he had not opposed my wish to become a writer. At that point, my father was not with us, but far away. I waited impatiently for his return. When he arrived, two weeks later, I ran to open the door. My father said nothing, but he immediately threw his arms around me in a way that told me he had liked the book very much. For a while, we were plunged into the sort of awkward silence that often accompanies moments of great emotion. Then, when we had calmed down and begun to talk, my father resorted to highly charged and exaggerated language to express his confidence in me and in my first novel: he told me that one day I would win the prize that I have now received with such great happiness. He said this not because he was trying to convince me of his good opinion or to set the prize as a goal; he said it like a Turkish father, supporting his son, encouraging him by saying, "One day you'll be a pasha!" For years, whenever he saw me, he would encourage me with the same words.

My father died in December, 2002. ♦

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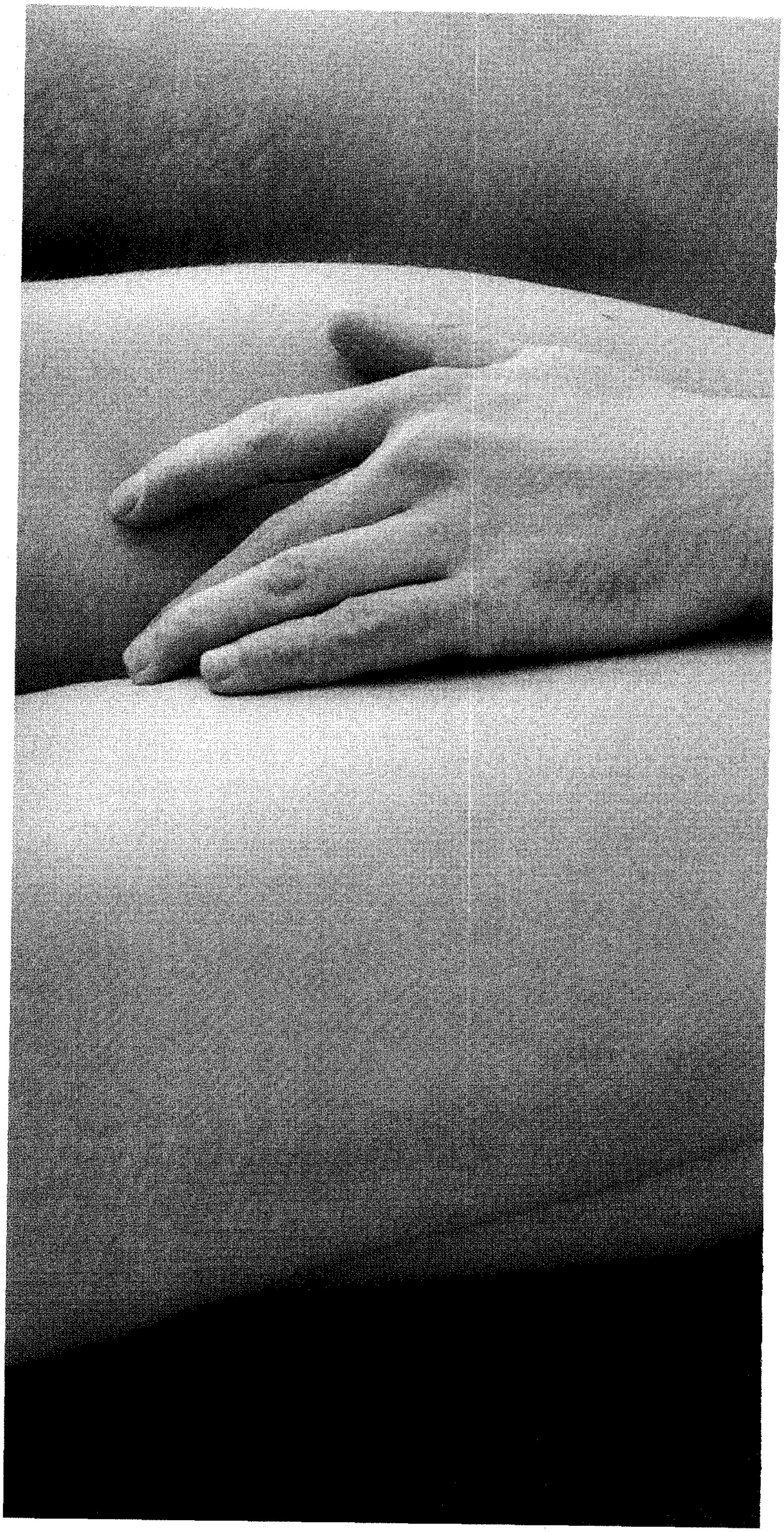
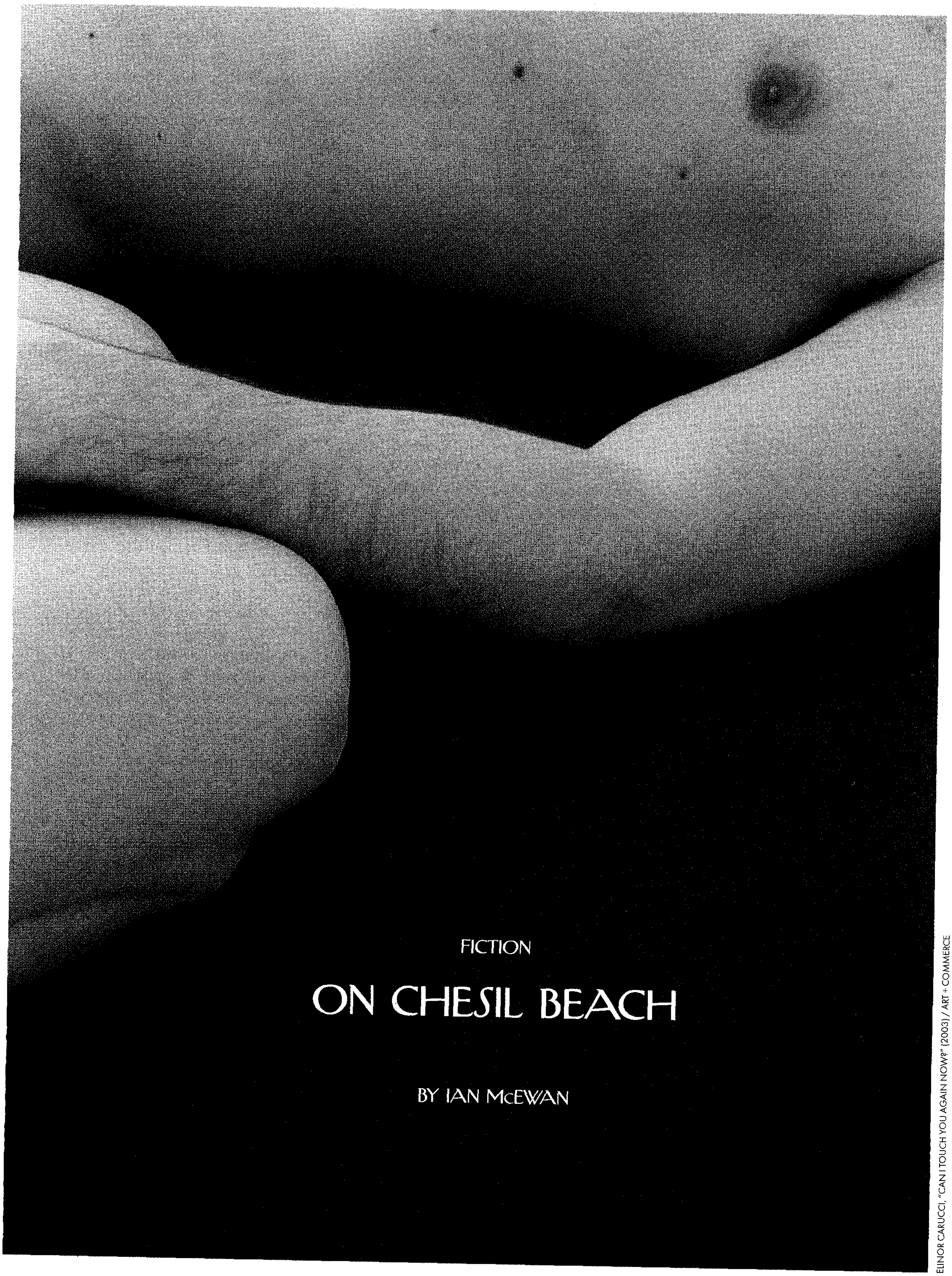
They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible. But it is never easy. They were sitting down to supper in a tiny room on the second floor of a Georgian inn in Dorset. In the next room, visible through the open door, was a fourposter bed, rather narrow, whose cover was pure white and stretched startlingly smooth, as though by no human hand. Edward did not mention that he had never stayed in a hotel before, whereas Florence, after many trips as a child with her father, was an old hand. Superficially, they were in fine spirits. Their wedding, at St. Mary's, Oxford, had gone well; the service had been decorous, the reception jolly, the sendoff from school and college friends raucous and uplifting. Her parents had not condescended to his, as they had feared, and his mother had not significantly misbehaved, or completely forgotten the purpose of the occasion. The couple had driven away in a small car belonging to Florence's mother and arrived in the early evening at their hotel on the coast in weather that was not perfect for mid-June or the circumstances but was entirely adequate: it was not raining, but nor was it quite warm enough, according to Florence, to eat outside on the terrace, as they had hoped. Edward thought that it was, but, polite to a fault, he would not think of contradicting her on such an evening.

So they were eating in their rooms before partially open French windows that gave onto a balcony and a view of a portion of the English Channel, and of Chesil Beach with its infinite shingle. Two youths in dinner jackets served them from a trolley parked outside in the corridor, and their comings and goings through what was generally known as the honeymoon suite made the waxed oak boards squeak comically against the silence. Proud and protective, Edward watched closely for any gesture or expression that might have seemed satirical. He could not have tolerated any sniggering. But these lads from a nearby village went about their business with bowed backs and closed faces, and their manner was tentative; their hands shook as they set items down on the starched linen tablecloth. They were nervous, too.

This was not a good moment in the history of English cuisine, but no one





FICTION

ON CHESIL BEACH

BY IAN McEWAN

ELINOR CARUCCI, "CAN I TOUCH YOU AGAIN NOW?" (2003) / ART + COMMERCE

much minded at the time, except visitors from abroad. The formal meal began, as so many did then, with a slice of melon decorated with a single glazed cherry. Out in the corridor, in silver dishes on candle-heated plate warmers, waited slices of long-ago roasted beef in a thickened gravy, soft boiled vegetables, and potatoes of a bluish hue. The wine was from France, though no particular region was mentioned on the label, which was embellished with a solitary darting swallow. It would not have crossed Edward's mind to order a red.

Desperate for the waiters to leave, he and Florence turned in their chairs to consider the view—of a broad mossy lawn and, beyond, a tangle of flowering shrubs and trees clinging to a steep bank, almost a cliff, that descended to a lane that led to the beach. They could see the beginnings of a footpath, dropping by muddy steps, a way lined by weeds of extravagant size, giant rhubarb and cabbages, they looked like, with swollen stalks more than six feet tall, bending under the weight of dark, thick-veined leaves. The garden vegetation rose before them, sensuous and tropical in its profusion, an effect heightened by the gray, soft light and a delicate mist drifting in from the sea, whose distant steady motion made lapping and sucking sounds against the grating pebbles. Their plan was to change into rough shoes after supper and walk on the shingle, between the sea and the lagoon known as the Fleet, and if they had not finished the wine they would take that with them, and swig from the bottle like gentlemen of the road.

And they had so many plans, giddy plans, heaped up before them in the hazy future, as richly tangled as the early-summer flora of the Dorset coast, and as beautiful—where and how they would live, who their close friends would be, his job with her father's firm, her musical career and what to do with the money her father had given her, and how they would not be like other people, at least, not inwardly. This was still the era—it would end later in that famous decade—when to be young was a social encumbrance, a mark of irrelevance, a faintly embarrassing condition for which marriage was the beginning of a cure. Almost strangers, they stood, strangely together, on a fresh pinnacle of existence, gleeful that their new status promised to promote them out of their endless youth—Edward and Florence, free at last! One of their favorite topics was their childhoods, not so much the pleasures as the fog of comical misconceptions from which they had emerged, and the various parental errors and outdated practices they could now forgive.

From these heights they could see clearly, but they could not describe to each other certain contradictory feelings: they separately worried about the moment, sometime soon after dinner, when their new maturity would be tested, when they would lie down together on the fourposter bed and reveal themselves fully to each other. For more than a year, Edward had been mesmerized by the prospect that on the evening of a given date in June the most sensitive portion of himself would reside, however briefly, within a naturally formed cavity inside this cheerful, pretty, formidably intelligent woman. How this was to be achieved without absurdity, or disappointment, troubled him. His specific worry, based on one unfortunate experience, was of overexcitement, of what he had heard someone describe as "arriving too soon." The matter was rarely out of his thoughts, but though his fear of failure was great, his eagerness—for rapture, for resolution—was far greater.

Florence's anxieties were more serious, and there had been moments during the journey from Oxford when she'd thought she was about to draw on all her courage to speak her mind. But what troubled her was unutterable, and she could barely frame it for herself. Where he merely suffered conventional first-night nerves, she experienced a visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness. For much of the time, through all the months of merry wedding preparation, she had managed to ignore this stain on her happiness, but whenever her thoughts turned toward a close embrace—she preferred no other term—her stomach tightened dryly, and she felt

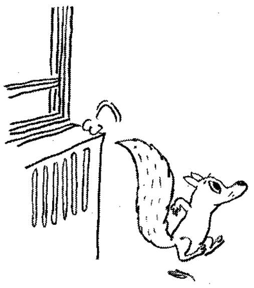
nausea at the back of her throat. In a modern, forward-looking handbook that was supposed to be helpful to young brides, with its cheery tones and exclamation marks and numbered illustrations, she had come across certain words and phrases that almost made her gag: "mucous membrane," and the sinister and glistening "glans." Other phrases offended her intelligence, particularly those concerning entrances: "Not long before he enters her . . ." Or "Now at last he enters her." And "Happily, soon after he has entered her . . ." Was she obliged on the night to transform herself for Edward into a kind of portal or drawing room through which he might process? Almost as frequent was a word that suggested to her nothing but pain, flesh parted before a knife: "penetration."

In optimistic moments, she tried to convince herself that she suffered from no more than a heightened form of squeamishness that was bound to pass. Certainly, the thought of Edward's testicles, pendulous below his "engorged penis"—another horrifying term—had the potency to make her upper lip curl, and the idea of herself being touched "down there" by someone else, even someone she loved, was as repulsive as, say, a surgical procedure on her eye. But her squeamishness did not extend to babies. She liked them; she had looked after her cousin's little boys on occasion and enjoyed herself. She thought that she would love being pregnant by Edward, and in the abstract, at least, she had no fears about childbirth. If only she could, like the mother of Jesus, arrive at that swollen state by magic.

Florence suspected that there was something profoundly wrong with her, that she had always been different, and that at last she was about to be exposed. Her problem, she thought, was greater, deeper, than straightforward physical disgust: her whole being was in revolt against the prospect of entanglement and flesh; her composure and essential happiness were about to be violated. She simply did not want to be "entered" or "penetrated." Sex with Edward could not be the summation of her joy but the price she must pay for it.

She knew that she should have spoken up long ago, as soon as he had proposed, long before the visit to the sincere and soft-spoken vicar, the dinners with their respective parents, before the wedding guests were invited, the gift list devised and lodged with a department store, and the tent and the photographer hired, and all the other irreversible arrangements. But what could she have said? What possible terms could she have used, when she could not name the matter to herself? And she loved Edward, not with the hot, moist passion she had read about but warmly, deeply, sometimes like a daughter, sometimes almost maternally. She loved cuddling him, and having his enormous arm around her shoulders, and being kissed by him, though she disliked his tongue in her mouth and had wordlessly made this clear. She thought that he was original, unlike anyone she had ever met. He always had a paperback book, usually history, in his jacket pocket in case he found himself in a queue or a waiting room. He marked what he read with a pencil stub. He was virtually the only man Florence had met who did not smoke. None of his socks matched. He had only one tie, narrow, knitted, dark blue, which he wore nearly all the time with a white shirt. She adored his curious mind, his mild country accent, the huge strength of his hands, the unpredictable swerves and drifts of his conversation, his kindness to her, and the way his soft brown eyes, resting on her when she spoke, made her feel enveloped in a friendly cloud of love. At the age of twenty-two, she had no doubt that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with Edward Mayhew. How could she have dared risk losing him?

There was no one she could have talked to. Ruth, her sister, was too young, and her mother, perfectly wonderful in her way, was too intellectual, too brittle, an old-fashioned bluestocking. Whenever she confronted an intimate problem, she tended to adopt the public manner of the lecture hall, and use longer and longer words, and make references to books that she thought everyone should have read. Only when the matter was safely bundled up in this way might she sometimes relax into kindliness, though that was rare, and even then you had no idea what advice you were receiving. Florence had some terrific friends from school and music college who posed the opposite problem: they adored intimate talk and revelled in one another's problems. They all knew one another, and were too eager with their phone calls and letters. She could not trust them with a secret, nor did she blame them, for she was part of the group. She would not have trusted herself. She was alone with a problem she did not know how to begin to address, and all she had in the way of help was her paperback guide. On its garish red cover were two smiling bug-eyed matchstick figures holding hands, drawn clumsily in white chalk, as though by an innocent child.



They ate the melon in less than two minutes while the lads, instead of waiting out in the corridor, stood well back, near the door, fingering their bow ties and tight collars and fiddling with their cuffs. Their blank expressions did not change as they observed Edward offer Florence, with an ironic flourish, his glazed cherry. Playfully, she sucked it from his fingers and held his gaze as she deliberately chewed, letting him see her tongue, conscious that in flirting with him like this she would be making matters worse for herself. She should not start what she could not sustain, but pleasing him in any way that she could was helpful: it made her feel less than entirely useless. If only eating a sticky cherry were all that was required.

To show that he wasn't troubled by the presence of the waiters, though he longed for them to leave, Edward smiled as he sat back with his wine and called over his shoulder, "Any more of those things?"

"Ain't none, sir. Sorry, sir."

But the hand that held the wineglass trembled as he struggled to contain his sudden happiness, his exaltation. Florence appeared to glow before him, and she was lovely—beautiful, sensuous, gifted, good-natured beyond belief.

The boy who had spoken nipped forward to clear away. His colleague was just outside the room, transferring the second course, the roast, to their plates. It was not possible to wheel the trolley into the honeymoon suite for the proper silver service on account of a two-step difference in level between the room and the corridor, a consequence of poor planning when the Elizabethan farmhouse was

"Georgianized" in the mid-eighteenth century.

The couple were briefly alone, though they heard the scrape of spoons on dishes, and the lads murmuring by the open door. Edward laid his hand over Florence's and said, for the hundredth time that day, in a whisper, "I love you," and she said it straight back, and she truly meant it.

Edward had a degree, a first in history from University College London. In three short years, he had studied wars, rebellions, famines, pestilences, the rise and collapse of empires, revolutions that consumed their children, agricultural hardship, industrial squalor, the cruelty of ruling élites—a colorful pageant of oppression, misery, and failed hopes. He understood how constrained and meagre lives could be, generation after generation. In the grand view of things, the peaceful, prosperous times that England was now experiencing were rare, and within them his and Florence's joy was exceptional, even unique. In his final year he had made a special study of the "great man" theory of history—was it really outmoded to believe that forceful individuals could shape national destiny? Certainly his tutor thought so: in his view, History, properly capitalized, was a grand narrative, driven forward by ineluctable forces toward inevitable, necessary ends, and soon the subject would be understood as a science. But the lives that Edward had examined in detail—Caesar, Charlemagne, Frederick II, Catherine the Great, Nelson, and Napoleon (Stalin he had dropped, at his tutor's insistence)—rather suggested the contrary. A ruthless personality, naked opportunism, and good luck, Edward had argued, could divert the fates of millions, a wayward conclusion that had earned him a B-minus, almost imperilling his first.

An incidental discovery was that even legendary success brought little happiness, only redoubled restlessness, gnawing ambition. As he was dressing for the wedding that morning (tails, top hat, a thorough drenching in cologne), he had decided that none of the figures on his list could have known his kind of satisfaction. His elation was a form of greatness in itself. Here he was, a gloriously fulfilled, or almost fulfilled, man. At the age of twenty-three, he had already outshone them all.

He was gazing at his wife now, into her intricately flecked hazel eyes, into those pure whites touched by a bloom of the faintest milky blue. The lashes were thick and dark, like a child's, and there was something childlike, too, in the solemnity of her face at rest. It was a lovely face, with a sculpted look that in a certain light brought to mind an American Indian woman, a highborn squaw. She had a strong jaw, and her smile was broad and artless, right into the creases at the corners of her eyes. She was big-boned—certain matrons at the wedding had knowingly remarked on her generous hips. Her breasts, which Edward had touched and even kissed, though nowhere near enough, were small. Her violinist's hands were pale and powerful, her long arms likewise; at her school sports days she had been adept at throwing the javelin.

Edward had never cared for classical music, but now he was learning its sprightly argot—legato, pizzicato, con brio. Slowly, through brute repetition, he was coming to recognize and even like certain pieces. There was one that she played with her friends which especially moved him. When she practiced her scales and arpeggios at home, she wore a hair band, an endearing touch that caused him to dream about the daughter they might have one day. Florence's playing was sinuous and exact, and she was known for the richness of her tone. One tutor said that he had never encountered a student who made an open string sing so warmly. When she was before the music stand in the rehearsal room in London, or in her room at her parents' house in Oxford, with Edward sprawled on the bed, watching and desiring her, she held herself gracefully, with back straight and head lifted and tilted proudly, and read the music with a commanding, almost haughty expression that stirred him. That look had such certitude, such knowledge of the path to pleasure.

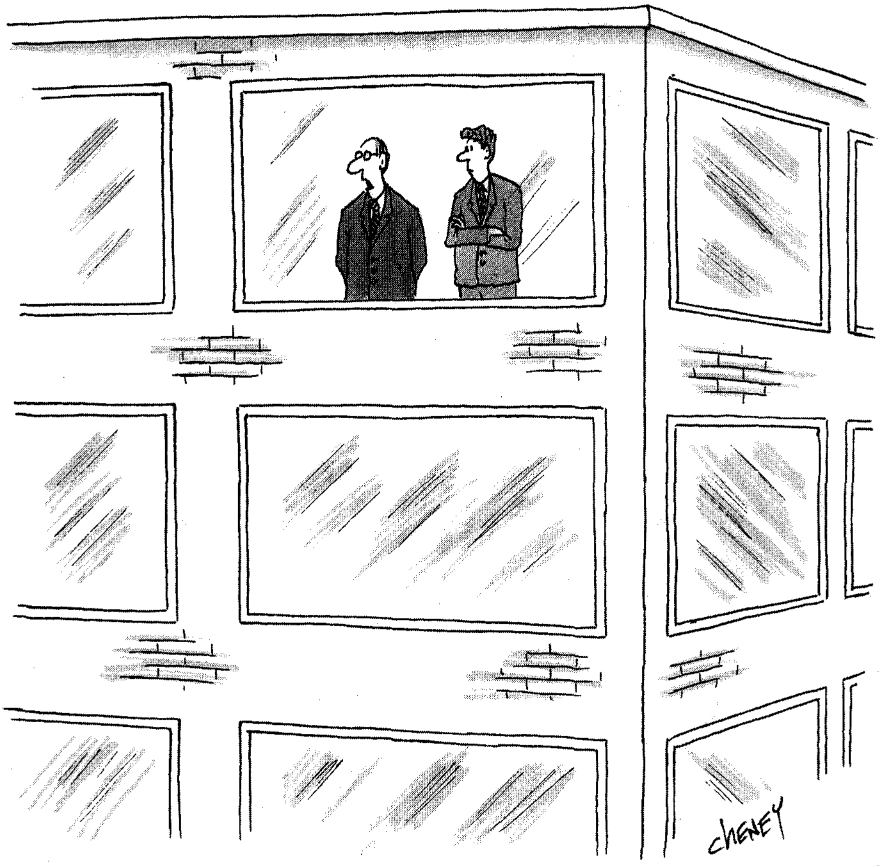
When the business was music, she was always confident and fluid in her movements—rosining a bow, restringing her instrument, rearranging the room to accommodate her three friends from college, for the string quartet that was her passion. She was the undisputed leader, and always had the final word in their many musical disagreements. But in the rest of her life she was surprisingly clumsy and unsure, forever stubbing a toe or knocking things over or bumping her head. The fingers that could manage the double stopping in a Bach partita were just as clever at dripping tea all over a linen tablecloth or dropping a glass onto a stone floor. She would trip over her own feet if she thought she was being watched—she confided to Edward that she found it an ordeal to be in the street, walking toward a friend from a distance. And whenever she was anxious or too self-conscious her hand would rise repeatedly to her forehead to brush away an imaginary strand of hair, a gentle, fluttering motion that would continue long after the source of stress had vanished.

How could he fail to love someone so strangely and warmly particular, so painfully honest and self-aware, whose every thought and emotion appeared naked to view, streaming like charged particles through her changing expressions and gestures? Even without her strong-boned beauty he would have had to love her. And she loved him with such intensity, such excruciating physical reticence. Not only his passions, heightened by the lack of a proper outlet, but also his protective instincts were aroused. But was she really so vulnerable? He had peeped once into her school-report folder and seen her intelligence-test results: a hundred and fifty-two, seventeen points above his own score. This was an age when these quotients were held to measure something as tangible as height or weight. When he sat in on a rehearsal with the quartet, and she had a difference of opinion on a phrasing or tempo or dynamic with Charles, the chubby and assertive second violinist, whose face shone with late-flowering acne, Edward was intrigued by how cool Florence could be. She did not argue; she listened calmly, then announced her decision. No sign then of the little hair-brushing action. She knew her stuff, and she was determined to lead, the way the first violin should. She also seemed to be able to get her rather frightening father to do what she wanted. Many months before the wedding, he had, at her suggestion, offered Edward a job. Whether Edward really wanted it, or dared to refuse it, was another matter. And she had known, by some womanly osmosis, exactly what was needed at that celebration, from the size of the tent to the quantity of summer pudding, and just how much it was reasonable to expect her father to pay.

"Here it comes," she whispered as she squeezed his hand, warning him off another sudden intimacy. The waiters were arriving with their plates of beef, his piled twice the height of hers. They also brought sherry trifle and Cheddar cheese and mint chocolates, which they arranged on a sideboard. After mumbling advice about the summoning bell by the fireplace—it had to be pressed hard and held down—the lads withdrew, closing the door behind them with immense care. Then came the tinkling of the trolley retreating down the corridor, then, after a silence, a whoop or a hoot that could easily have come from the hotel bar downstairs, and, at last, the newlyweds were properly alone.

A shift or a strengthening of the wind brought them the sound of wavelets breaking on the shore below, like a distant shattering of glasses. The mist was lifting to reveal dense trees and foliage curving away above the shoreline to the east. They could see a luminous gray smoothness between the boughs and leaves which might have been the silky surface of the sea itself, or the lagoon, or the sky—it was difficult to tell. The altered breeze carried through the parted French windows an enticement, a salty scent of oxygen and open space that seemed at odds with the starched table linen, the corn-flour-stiffened gravy, and the heavy polished silver they were taking in their hands. The wedding lunch had been huge and prolonged. They were not hungry. It was, in theory, open to them to abandon their plates, seize the wine bottle by the neck, and run down to the shore and kick their shoes off and exult in their liberty. There was no one in the hotel who would have wanted to stop them. They were adults at last, on holiday, free to do as they chose. In just a few years' time, that would be the kind of thing that quite ordinary young people would do. But, for now, the times held them. Even when Edward and Florence were alone, a thousand unacknowledged rules still applied. It was precisely because they were adults that they did not do childish things like walk away from a meal that others had taken pains to prepare. It was dinnertime, after all. And being childlike was not yet honorable, or in fashion.

Still, Edward was troubled by the call of the beach, and if he had known how to propose it, or justify it, he might have suggested going out straightaway. The



"During my meteoric rise to the top, I failed to notice I was in the wrong building."

ceiling, low enough already, appeared now nearer to his head, and closing in. Rising from his plate, mingling with the sea breeze, was a clammy odor, like the breath of the family dog. Perhaps he was not quite as joyous as he kept telling himself he was. He felt a terrible pressure narrowing his thoughts, constraining his speech, and he was in acute physical discomfort—his trousers or underwear seemed to have shrunk.

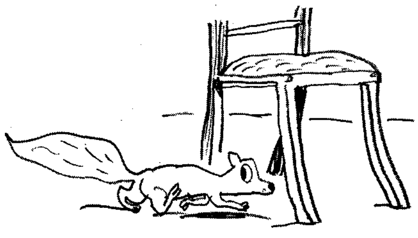
But if a genie had appeared at the table to grant Edward's most urgent request, he would not have asked for any beach in the world. All he wanted, all he could think of, was himself and Florence lying naked together on or in the bed next door, confronting at last that awesome experience which seemed as remote from daily life as a vision of religious ecstasy, or even death itself. The prospect—was it actually going to happen? to him?—once more sent cool fingers through his lower gut, and he caught himself in a momentary swooning motion that he concealed behind a contented sigh.

Like most young men of his time, or any time, without an easy manner, or a means of sexual expression, he indulged constantly in what one enlightened authority was now calling "self-pleasuring." Edward had been pleased to discover the term. He was born too late in the century, in 1940, to believe that he was abusing his body, that his sight would be impaired, or that God watched with stern incredulity as he bent daily to the task. Or even that everyone knew about it from his pale and inward look. All the same, a certain ill-defined disgrace hung over his efforts, a sense of failure and waste, and, of course, loneliness. And pleasure was really an incidental benefit. The goal was release—from the urgent, thought-confining desire for what could not be immediately had. How extraordinary it was, that a self-made spoonful, leaping clear of his body, should instantly free his mind to confront afresh Nelson's decisiveness at Aboukir Bay.

Edward's single most important contribution to the wedding arrangements had been to refrain, for more than a week. Not since he was twelve had he been so entirely chaste with himself. He wanted to be in top form for his bride. It was not easy, especially at night in bed, or in the mornings as he woke, or in the long afternoons, or in the hours before lunch, or after supper, in the hours before bed. Now here they were at last, married and alone. Why did he not rise from his roast, cover her in kisses, and lead her toward the fourposter next door? It was not so simple. He had a fairly long history of engaging with Florence's shyness. He had come to respect it, even revere it, mistaking it for a form of coyness, a conventional veil for a richly sexual nature—in all, part of the intricate depth of her personality, and proof of her quality. He convinced himself that he preferred her this way. He did not spell it out for himself, but her reticence suited his own ignorance and lack of confidence; a more sensual and demanding woman, a *wild* woman, might have terrified him.

Their courtship had been a pavane, a stately unfolding, bound by protocols never agreed upon or voiced but generally observed. Nothing was ever discussed—nor did they feel the lack of intimate talk. These were matters beyond words, beyond definition. The language and practice of therapy, the currency of feelings diligently shared, mutually analyzed, were not yet in general circulation. While one heard of wealthier people going in for psychoanalysis, it was not customary to regard oneself in everyday terms as an enigma, as an exercise in narrative history, or as a problem waiting to be solved.

Between Edward and Florence nothing happened quickly. Important advances, permissions wordlessly granted to extend what he was allowed to see or caress, were attained only gradually. The day in October when he first saw her naked breasts long preceded the day when he could touch them—December 19th. He kissed them in February, though not her nipples, which he had grazed with his lips once, in May. She allowed herself to advance across his body with even greater caution. Sudden moves or radical suggestions on his part could undo months of good work. The evening in the cinema, at a showing of "A Taste of Honey," when he had taken her hand and plunged it between his legs set the process back weeks. She became . . . not frosty, or even cool—that was never her way—but imperceptibly remote, perhaps disappointed, or even faintly betrayed. She retreated from him somehow without letting him ever feel in doubt about her love. Then, at last, they were back on course: when they were alone one Saturday afternoon in late March, with the rain falling heavily outside the windows of the disorderly sitting room of his parents' tiny house in the Chiltern Hills, she let her hand rest briefly on, or near, his penis. For less than fifteen seconds, in rising hope and ecstasy, he felt her through two layers of fabric. As soon as she pulled away he knew he could bear it no more. He asked her to marry him.



He could not have known what it cost her to put a hand—it was the back of her hand—in such a place. She loved him, she wanted to please him, but she had to overcome considerable distaste. It was an honest attempt—she may have been clever, but she was without guile. She kept that hand in place for as long as she could, until she felt a stirring and hardening beneath the gray flannel of his trousers. She experienced a living thing, quite separate from her Edward—and she recoiled. Then he blurted out his proposal, and in the rush of emotion, the delight and hilarity and relief, the sudden embrace, she momentarily forgot her shock. And he was so astonished by his own decisiveness, as well as mentally cramped by unresolved desire, that he could have had little idea of the contradiction she began to live with from that day on, the secret affair between disgust and joy.

They were alone then, and theoretically free to do whatever they wanted, but they went on eating the dinner they had no appetite for. Florence set down her knife and reached for Edward's hand and squeezed. From downstairs they heard the wireless, and the chimes of Big Ben that preceded the ten-o'clock news. Along this stretch of coast, television reception was poor because of the hills just inland. The older guests would be down there in the sitting room, taking the measure of the world with their nightcaps—the hotel had a good selection of single

MICHAEL ACKERMAN / VU

FICTION

MONKEY HILL

BY PAUL THEROUX

They were round-shouldered and droopy-headed like mourners, the shadowy child-size creatures squatting by the side of the sloping road. All facing the same way, too, as though silently venerating the muted dirty sunset beyond the holy city. Motionless at the edge of the ravine, they were miles from the city and the wide flat river that snaked into the glow, where the sun smoldered in a towering heap of dust like a cloud bank. What were they looking at? The light dimmed, went colder, and the creatures stirred.

"They're almost human," Audie Blunden said, and looked closer at their matted fur.

With a bark like a bad cough, the biggest monkey raised his curled tail, lowered his arms, and thrust forward on his knuckles. The others, skittering on smaller limbs, followed him, their tails nodding, and the great troop of straggling monkeys moved along the road and up the embankment toward the stringy trees at the edge of the forest.

"They scare me," Beth Blunden said, and though the nearest monkey was more than fifteen feet away she could feel the prickle of its grubby fur creeping across the bare skin of her arm.

But Audie hadn't heard. He was peering into the thickening dusk. "Incredible," he said, in a whisper. "I think they were watching the sunset, just lingering for the last warmth of the sun. Like us."

Beth stared at him, not because of what he'd said but the way he'd said it. He sounded so pompous, chewing on this simple observation. They travelled a lot, and she had noticed that travel often made her normally straightforward husband pretentious.

They were at the edge of a low summit, one of the foothills of the Himalayas. From farther up the ridge, where they were staying—a health spa called Agni—on a clear day they could see snow-topped peaks. They had come to Agni planning to stay a week. The week had passed quickly; they'd stayed another, and now they had agreed to renew their arrangement from week to week, telling themselves that they'd leave when they were ready.

They were world travellers, yet they'd never seen anything like this. The file of monkeys hurried up the road, with an odd skip-drag gait, the big bold leader up front, now and then barking in his severe way.

"Good evening."

A man emerged from the twilit road, stepping neatly to allow the file of monkeys to pass by. The Blundens were not startled. Their time here had prepared them. They had not seen much of India, but they knew that whenever they hesitated anywhere, looking puzzled or even thoughtful, an Indian would step forward to explain, usually an old man, a bobble-headed pedant, a man urgent with irrelevancies. This one wore a white shirt, a thick vest and scarf, baggy pants, and sandals. Big horn-rimmed glasses distorted his eyes.

"I see you are in process of observing our monkeys."

Like the other explainers, this one precisely summed up what they'd been doing.

"Do not be perplexed," he went on.

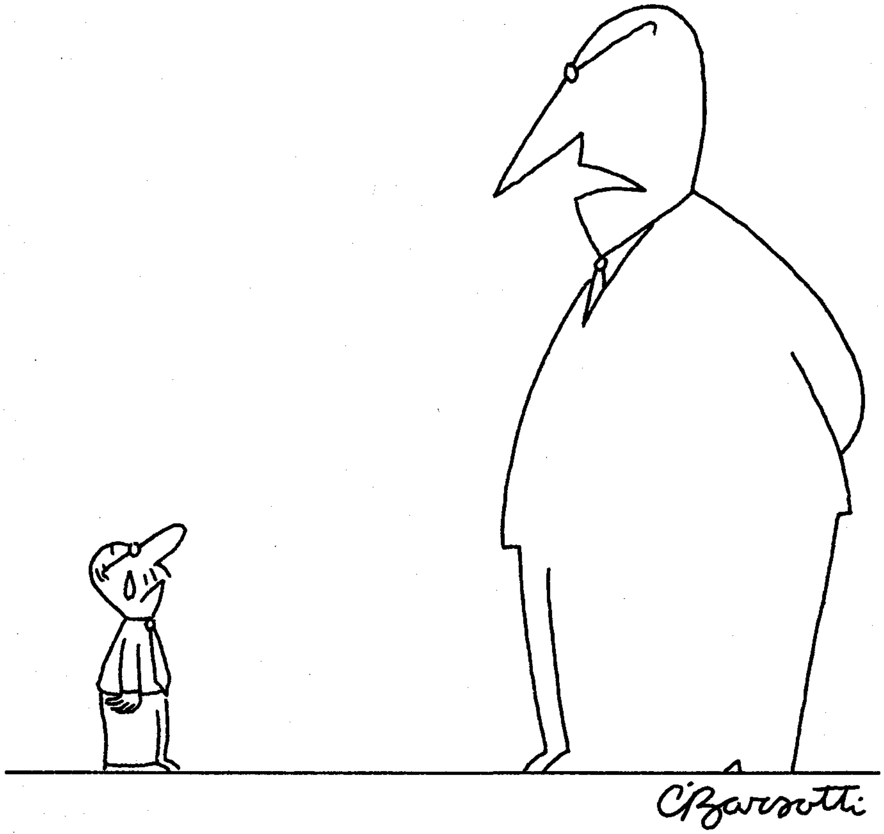
It was true—they had been perplexed.

"They are assembling each evening. They are taking last of warmth into bodies." He had a voluptuous and slightly starved way of saying "bodies," giving the word flesh.

"I figured so," Audie said. "That's what I said to my wife—didn't I, Beth?"

"They are also looking at smoke and fires at temple in town."

That was another thing they'd found. Indians like this never listened. They would deliver a monologue, usually informative but oddly without emphasis, as though it were a recitation, and did not



"Is that one of the emotions people talk about?"

appear to be interested in anything that the Blundens had to say.

"What temple? What town?" the Blundens asked at once.

The Indian was pointing into the darkness. "When sun is down, monkeys hasten away—see—to the trees where they will spend night hours, safe from harm's way. Yes, leopards are there. Not one or two but abundant. Monkeys are their meat."

"Meat" was another delicious word, which the man uttered as though tempted by it, giving it the sinewy density of something forbidden. But he hadn't answered them.

"There's leopards here on Monkey Hill?" Audie asked.

The old man seemed to wince in disapproval, and Audie guessed it was his saying "Monkey Hill"—but that was what most people at Agni called it, and it was easier to remember than its Indian name.

"It is believed that Hanuman Giri is exact place where monkey god Hanuman plucked the mountain of herbals and healing plants for restoring life of Rama's brother Lakshman."

Yes, that was it, Hanuman Giri. At first they'd thought that he was answering their question about leopards, but what was this about herbals?

"As you can find in Ramayana," the Indian said, and pointed with his skinny hand. "There, do you see mountain beyond some few trees?" He did not wait for a reply. "Not at all. It is empty space, where mountain once stood. Now it is town and temple. Shrine, so to say."

"No one mentioned any temple."

"At one time was Muslim mosque, built five centuries before, Mughal era, on site of Hanuman temple. Ten years ago, trouble, people invading mosque and burning. Hanuman is deity in image of monkey, as Ganesh is image of elephant," the Indian said. "And what is your country, if you please?"

"We're Americans," Beth said, happy at last to have been asked.

"There are many wonders here," the Indian said, unimpressed. "You could stay here whole lifetime and still not see everything."

He was scowling at the valley he had described, where the mountain had been uprooted.

"How old do you think I am?" he asked. "You will never guess."

"Seventy-something?"

"I am in my eighty-third year. I do yoga meditation every morning for one hour. I have never tasted meat, nor alcoholic beverage. Now I will go home and take little dhal and puri and curd, that is all."

"Where do you live?"

"Just here. Hanuman Nagar."

"Your village?"

"Township of Hanuman Nagar is substantial, with a market and textiles weaving and sundry spheres of commercial enterprise, including ironmongers, potmaking, clay-baking, for house tiles, kilns, and enamelling."

"No one mentioned a town," Audie said.

"As well as fruit and nut trees. I myself am wholesaling nut meats. Also, as mentioned, Hanuman shrine. Ancient temple. I bid you good evening."

With that he stepped into the darkness. The Blundens walked up the road in the opposite direction, remarking, as they went, on the poise of the old man, his self-possession, his pedantry. How easy it was to jeer at him, yet he had told them several things they hadn't known—the town, its industries, the Hanuman story, the temple business. What they had been thinking of as simply Monkey Hill had a history, and drama, and now, on that lower slope, a settlement.

"Did you understand what he said about the mosque and the temple?" Beth asked.

Audie shrugged and said, "You get these Indians talking and they'll flog a dead horse into dog food."

They had a surprise on their way up the road, walking back through the gate to the lodge. They had seen the gate when they came down but they had not noticed the signs: "Right of Entry Prohibited Except by Registered Guests" and "No Trespassing" and "Authorized Vehicles Only."

"This means you!" Audie said, shaking his finger into the darkness. "Get your happy ass out of here!"

"You're awful, Butch," Beth said, and giggled because it was dark and they were in India, alone on this road, dust in their nostrils, and here he was making a joke, being silly. His unruly behavior was a comfort to her; she had loved him for it and regarded it as a form of protection for more than thirty years.

Beyond the gateway, they saw the lights of the lodge, and Agni itself, the former maharaja's residence, a baronial mansion, and in the bamboo grove the spa buildings, the pool, the palm trees, the yoga pavilion, glowing in spotlights, the whole place crowning the summit of the hill. Staff members passing them on the path pressed their hands together in prayer and said "*Namaste*" or "*Namaskar*," and some of the Tibetans, in an attractive gesture, touched their right hands to their hearts. Audie did the same in return and found himself moved by it.

They were getting up to leave the dinner table when they heard a sharp "Hello." An Indian man had materialized next to them, carrying a clipboard.

"Doctor," Beth said—she had forgotten his name but then she saw his Agni nameplate. "Dr. Nagaraj."

He had told them earlier that he would see them at dinner, and they had forgotten. But he was unfussed, saying "Not to worry" as they apologized.

"We've already eaten," Audie said, seeing the waitress approach with three menus. She stood next to the table, looking serene, patient, attentive. He smiled at the girl. The nameplate pinned to her yellow-and-white sari was lettered "Anna." She had a pale, round face, like a doll's; her hair in a bun, drawn back tight, gave her prominent ears. She was lovely. He'd seen her at the spa in the white pajamas the massage therapists wore.

"Is that short for something—maybe Annapurna?" he asked her.

"No, sir. Mother of Mary. I am Christian, sir."

"Imagine that."

"From Nagaland, sir. Kohima, sir. Very far, sir."

"I've seen you in the spa."

"I also do treatments in daytime, sir."

"Are you eating, Doctor?" Audie said.

"Thank you, no. I don't take food after 6 P.M." He spoke to the girl. "I will take some salted lassi."

"We should follow your example," Beth said.

"As you wish."

"Three of those, Anna, please."

"Thank you, sir." She stepped silently away, clutching the menus.

"Where did you say you went to medical school?" Audie asked.

"Ayurvedic Institute in Mangalore."

"That makes you a doctor?"

"Ayurvedic doctor, yes."

"Can you practice outside India?"

"Where Ayurvedic medicine is licensed," Dr. Nagaraj said. "May I see your right hand, sir?" And when Audie placed his big hand in the doctor's warm slender one, the doctor said, "Just relax," and scrutinized it, and made some notes on his clipboard. Still holding Audie's palm, the doctor raised his eyes and did not smile.

"You had a hard life until age thirty-five," he said. "You prepared the ground, so to say. Then you reaped rewards. Next ten years very good for name and fame. Madam?"

He offered his hand to Beth and she placed hers, palm upward, on his.

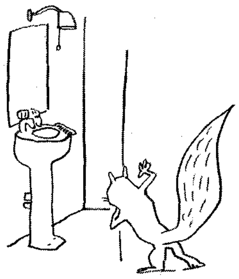
"How long will I live?" Audie said.

"Until eighty-five, if all is observed," the doctor said without hesitating. He went back to examining Beth's palm, and scribbling notes.

"I don't want to know how long I'm going to live," Beth said. "Just give me some good news."

"Happy childhood, but you have no children yourself," the doctor said. "Next ten years, excellent health. Never trust any person blindly, especially those who praise you. Follow intuition. Avoid crowds, smoke, dust." The doctor strained, as though translating from a difficult language. "Avoid perfume. No litigation."

As the doctor tensed, showing his teeth, Beth said, "That's enough," and lifted her hand away. Audie glanced at her and assumed that she was also wondering whether Dr. Nagaraj was a quack. But that thought was not in her mind.



Dr. Nagaraj sipped his lassi. He nodded and tapped his clipboard.

"I took my friend Sanjeev to Rajaji National Forest to see the wild elephants. They are my passion. Did you not see my collection of Ganeshes in my office?"

"I remember," Beth said. "The elephant figurines on the shelves."

"Quite so." The doctor drank again. "We encountered a great herd of elephants in Rajaji. They are not the same as the working domesticated elephants but a separate matter. They saw us. We were near the banks of the river. Do you know the expression 'Never get between an elephant and water'?"

"I guess we do now," Audie said.

"The elephants became enraged. I saw the bull elephant trumpeting and I ran and hid in the trees. Sanjeev was behind me, rooted to the spot, too frightened to move. I watched with horror as the huge elephant bore down on him, followed by the herd of smaller elephants, raising so much dust. Seeing them, Sanjeev bowed his head and knelt, knowing he was about to die. He couldn't run, he couldn't swim. But he did yoga—*bidalasana*, cat position, instinctive somehow."

Flexing his fingers, making a business of it, Dr. Nagaraj straightened the mat in front of him, tidied the coaster under his glass, then dipped his head and sucked at the lassi.

"What happened?" Audie asked.

Dr. Nagaraj went vague, his face slackening, then, "Oh, yes," as he pretended to remember what he'd been saying. "The great bull elephant lowered his head as though to charge. But instead of impaling Sanjeev on his tusks, as I had expected, the elephant knelt, trapping him between the two great tusks. Not to kill him, oh, no. It was to protect him from the other elephants' trampling him."

He seemed to be on the point of saying more when Beth announced that she was exhausted, that she would be a basket case if she didn't get some sleep.

They woke to a brilliant sunrise and felt that days like this existed only on this hilltop. The rest of India and the stormy world were elsewhere.

Was it three weeks they'd been here? Or four? They had lost their sense of passing time. Being at Agni had strengthened them—it was like a cure for an obscure but tenacious ailment of which they'd been unaware. Rested, well looked after, like children on an extended holiday, they were invigorated, enjoying the power of contentment. Audie had even stopped teasing the waiters about the food, had stopped calling the uttapam "shit on a shingle."

The staff waited on the Blundens, devoted, and prescient, too, anticipating their desires. When they skipped meals, the waiters would say, "We missed you last night," as though their absence were a diminishment.

The Blundens were, to their surprise, grateful. They were wealthy, they owned four homes in four different states, and they knew all about employees and servants. They had gardeners, housekeepers, caretakers, but all of them were so well paid and so used to their employers as to be presumptuous. *You need us* seemed to show in their resentful eyes. Indian workers were neither presumptuous nor servile; well spoken, even educated, they were like people from another planet, whose eyes said, *We need you.*

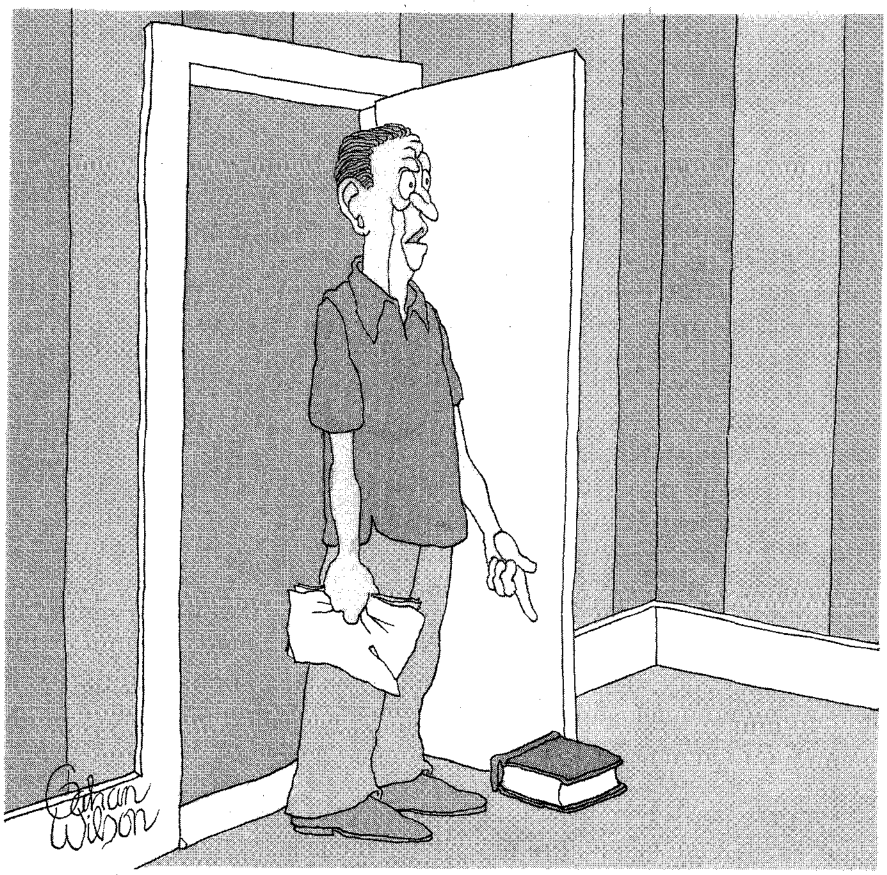
"I should start a company here," Audie said. "Or do what everyone else is doing, outsource here."

They had arrived at Mumbai Airport one dark smoky midnight and had been driven swiftly past lamplit shacks to an enormous hotel, where they stayed in the Elephanta Suite—Audie intoned the name printed over the carved doorway. At dawn, they were taken back to the airport for the flight to the holy city, where they were met by a driver in a white uniform holding a platter of chilled face towels. All the Blundens had seen of India—the populous and chaotic India they'd been warned about, the India that made you sick and fearful and impatient—was the one-hour drive from the airport to the top of Monkey Hill. Audie thought of the drive as a long panning shot, the sort you'd get in a documentary with a jumping camera, the very first image a woman with no hands, begging at a stoplight just outside the airport, raising her stumps to Audie's window ("Don't look, honey"), then the overloaded lopsided trucks with "Horn Please" lettered on their bumpers, the oxcarts piled high with bulging sacks sharing the road with crammed buses painted blue and red, women slapping clothes onto boulders in a dirty stream, others threshing grain on mats. Whitewashed temples, mosques with minarets like sharpened pencils, the lean-tos and tents of squatters. Every few miles, huge billboards showing movie posters of bug-eyed fatties in tight clothes. This India had no smell and hardly any sound: the windows of the car were closed, the air-conditioner on.

"They've got zip," Audie said, his face to the car window. And, in conversation with various Indian guests at Agni, "Sure, I saw the Indian miracle."

The miracle to the Blundens was that India was not a country but a creature, like an elephantine body bristling with insect life, pestilential with people. And another miracle was that they'd found the remote part of it that was safe.

Agni was in the heart of India, yet India seemed far away. Perhaps that was the secret to experiencing this country: you had to bury yourself so deeply in it that you avoided suffering it. The few times at Agni when they'd seen something exotic or strange—like the monkeys staring at the sunset—it was not anything they'd anticipated, not the India of stereotype, and that was so disconcerting that they withdrew through the Agni gate and shut India out.



"My novel is not a doorstop!"

On their way to the yoga pavilion that morning, they saw ropes of smoke untangling in the sky, in the direction where the old man had pointed with his skinny hand. There was an earthy smell of damp flowers and also the smell of the distant fire.

Half a dozen others had preceded them to the pavilion, and were already sitting on rush mats, in the lotus position, some of them with eyes closed in meditation. The Blundens took their places. Vikram, the yoga teacher, sat on a raised platform, his hands clasped under his chin.

"Om," Vikram chanted three times. Then, "Rub your hands, massage your eyes, feel the energy, feel the vibration. Open your eyes slowly, listen to the birds singing."

The Blundens stood, they stretched, they did "the tree"; they raised their arms, locked their hands.

"For *tadasana*, mountain pose. Think, This is Hanuman mountain. Find something to concentrate on," Vikram said. "A brick. A leaf."

Audie saw a crack on a pillar of the pavilion. He stared hard at it. It held him up; he balanced on the crack, and it turned from a flaw to a distinct profile, a coastline, something with symmetry and meaning.

"Now, slowly, lie on mat with feet apart. Inhaling breath, raise legs twenty degrees and slowly let out breath."

They assumed the posture of the archer, the cat, the dog, and the crocodile. Without remarking on it to each other, the Blundens knew that they were improving. Beth, who had gripped her calves on the first day, could now touch the mat with her fingertips; Audie, who had trembled with his legs aloft, could now hold the position.

The end of the session came sooner and sooner. Afterward, they lay for a minute or so, stretched flat on their mats, feeling the cool air on their faces, all the drowsiness of deep sleep wrung from their bodies.

Lying there today, they were aware of the subtle smoke smell, as well as of something fouler—a whiff of excrement.

"I am limp," Audie said. "I feel wonderful."

Not limp, Beth thought. She felt, instead, a heightened awareness, a keener sense of smell and touch. She was not soothed so much as set on edge.

"With each breath," Audie was saying, "I was sort of inhaling peacefulness through my nose, calming myself and getting lighter."

Beth smiled at him and said, "It's lovely—I want to go on doing this when we get home." Yet nothing that Audie had described was what she had experienced. Lying on her mat, she had felt energy pulsing out of the solid earth and up her spine. Raising her eyes, tipping her head backward, she had sensed more energy pouring into her from the sky. Her fingers were limber, her grip was tested; she received power through her bare feet.

"Meet you at the pool," he said. "I'm going up to the lobby to sign on for another week."

Later, as they were reading under the sun shade by the pool, they became aware of a stirring just behind them—Audie heard a rustle of feet in dry leaves and the shake of branches, while for Beth it was less a sound than a prickling of her skin, a distinct physicality like a change in temperature, and a sense that she was being watched.

Wm Hamilton

"Ed does all the marvellous new things they do with money."

• •

They both turned, but they saw only a swaying tree limb.

"Look at the time," Audie said, twisting his wrist. "I've got a treatment."

"Which one?"

"*Abhiyanga.*"

He did not say that on his way back from the lobby he had stopped by the spa and signed up for this treatment, requesting that his massage therapist be Anna, whom they had met the previous evening in the restaurant.

"This way, sir," she said when he arrived at the spa, leading him up the marble stairs and past the gushing fountain to the massage room. A small dark woman awaited them there. She, too, greeted him, and bowed her head.

"This is Sarita," Anna said.

The two women helped him onto the wooden table, where he lay on his stomach, his face on a folded towel. His first sensation was of hot oil drizzled on the small of his back, fingers stirring it, spreading it, pressing it into his spine. Anna was on one side, Sarita on the other.

Without effort, Audie sank into a reverie about the women he had known. He always did this when he was massaged. He did not orchestrate the reverie—he just let it wash over him. He guessed that it was his reaction to being touched by a strange woman's hands. He thought of the women he'd most desired in his life—not the casual sex partners or one-night stands but the affairs that had exhausted him with the pleasure and pain of love. Yet what he recalled about these women, in the course of the massage, was not the beginning of the romance or the succeeding trysts but the last time he'd seen each woman, the day he'd ended things, the point at which his desire had died down and his guilt at deceiving Beth had overcome him. Usually he had waited until after making love to say what he'd rehearsed: "I won't be able to see you anymore." Afterward, he had averted his eyes from the woman's body as she dressed, fearing to be aroused by his pity. Each time, as he waited, the woman seemed to recede, to grow smaller, losing significance—as though she were standing on a railway platform and he were at the window of a train, pulling away, waving goodbye. Although these partings had been painful for him as well, he had always been able to say, "What did you expect? I'm a married man. I have obligations. What about my wife?"

After each breakup, he'd bought something for Beth—a charm for her bracelet, some flowers, a scarf, a pair of earrings—and offered her the present, saying, "I love you, Tugar. I could never love anyone else." As a child, unable to pronounce the word "sugar," she'd said "tugar"—she had told him this once and the name had stuck. He used it only in moments of grateful tenderness, just as in similar moments of gratitude she called him Butch.

"Be careful, sir." Anna was wiping the oil from one of his feet, Sarita wiping the other.

They helped him off the massage table and guided him to the shower, where he scrubbed himself clean. He left the room swaying slightly, fatigued and stunned by the experience.

At lunch, Beth said, "How was it?"

"The treatment? Very nice."

They were sitting outside, the sun-speckled shade falling across their table.

"Did you swim?" Audie asked.

"I wasn't in the mood," she said. "I've got a treatment now," she added, setting her soup spoon down, patting her lips with her napkin.

They kissed, brushing cheeks, puckering, a sound like tasting air.

As Beth walked through the bamboo grove to the spa, she passed the gift shop. A woman in an Agni sari standing at the door stepped aside and said, "Please. You are welcome."

"I'm running late, but I wanted to know if you have any shahtooshes."

"We can obtain," the woman said, a sweep of her head indicating her complete coöperation. "But it is not easy."

"In what way not easy?"

"It is contraband item."

"I was thinking of looking in the town. I didn't even know there was a town!"

"Hanuman Nagar. Not available. Not hygienic."

"But there's the monkey temple?"

"Shrine, yes, but not temple. Disputed temple, so to say."

"I'm sure it's interesting," Beth said, because the woman was agitated, as the Indians at Agni seemed to be when they were contradicted, or even questioned.

"There is such confusion, Madam. Even hullabaloo," the woman said, widening her eyes. "Please, you desire shahtoosh, we will obtain full range of shahtoosh for you, with discretion."

At the spa, Beth was met by a young girl in a white uniform, in a posture of greeting, hands clasped, head bowed. "*Namaskar*. I am Prithi."

On the way to the massage suite, Prithi complimented Beth on her lovely bag ("It is smart, Madam") and on her clear skin. Beth thanked her, but thought, Why not? I take care of myself. I eat right. I exercise. I'm only fifty. She was fifty-three, but what was the difference? The next big birthday was far off and unthinkable.

Prithi helped her onto the table and tucked a towel around her.

"Thai massage, Madam."

"Yes," Beth murmured into the cushion under her face.

She was tugged, first her shoulders and back, her legs pushed and pulled, each part of her body proving its elasticity; the physicality of the treatment was like an acknowledgment that she was fully alive. And there was something else—the oddness of having an Indian girl, hardly twenty, caress her this way. No man apart from Audie had ever seen her like this. But the rhythm of the massage, the hands moving across her skin, the sense of blood being expressed through her muscles—it all induced in her the sensation of being embraced and warmed by another body. She did not mind that the other person was a woman—she was, in fact, reassured by the thought that only another woman would understand.

Audie was peering into the fishpond outside the dining-room lobby, seeming to stare at the white-and-orange koi gulping at bubbles, but he was only killing time, looking sideways at Anna, who had changed into her restaurant uniform, the yellow-and-white sari.

"Good treatment, sir?" Anna said, coming up behind him.

"The best," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

He turned to size her up, wondering if she knew that she sounded like a coquette. He looked for a nuance on her lips, a lingering light in her eyes.

"They are lucky fish," Anna said.

"Lucky in what way?"

"One Japanese guest tell me so, sir. Lucky fish."

The fish were fat, their fins like wings, their big purselike mouths gasping.

"Jesus Christ is a fish, sir."

Audie dipped his head to the side, as he did when he heard something unexpected.

"The sign of fish is in all church, sir. Is a symbol, you can say, sir."

Do I know this? Audie wondered, yet he was distracted by Anna's doll-like face, her slightly slanted eyes in puffy sockets, her fleshy lips.

"Is that on the menu?" Beth said, stepping through the door and seeing her husband and the employee at the rail of the fishpond.

Dr. Nagaraj appeared just then as well, and Anna stepped back and became formal, deferring to a superior in the Indian way.

"We were discussing the fish," Audie said.

"Ah, yes. Fish." He said *peesh*, making it sound inedible.

"The Christian symbolism. Jesus is represented as a fish."

Dr. Nagaraj waggled his head; he was saying yes, but he didn't have a clue.

Anna, self-conscious, sidled back to the table of menus.

"Will you join us for dinner?" Beth asked.

As the doctor waggled his head again, Audie said, "Just pineapple juice for me. I'm not eating after six."

"Avoid sour juices," Dr. Nagaraj said.

Beth said, "I'm hungry—I'm eating."

The massage had given her an appetite—hunger she took to be a sign of health.

"Hinduism predates Christianity by many centuries," Dr. Nagaraj said at the table, without prompting. "You can find god Agni in Rigveda—more than three thousand of years back. It is our path, our way of seeing the world, our consolation and salvation. Multiple functions and essential to Ayurveda."

Dr. Nagaraj had a gift for rumbling on, deaf to any interruptions, as though no one else present had anything worthwhile to say—which, Audie reflected, was probably so, since neither he nor Beth had much to add. Beth was intent now on one of Dr. Nagaraj's stories.

"Elephants," he was saying, "bearing down on my friend Sanjeev."

Hadn't he told this story before?

"But Sanjeev could not swim. He sank to his knees, as big bull elephant approached. And elephant, too, fell to his knees and enclosed poor Sanjeev between his great tusks."

"And protected him from the other elephants," Beth said.

"In beginning, yes, protection was there. Tusks were there," Dr. Nagaraj said. "But elephant rose to his feet and withdrew. Sanjeev remained on his knees, head down. When coast was clear, I went down and found that my friend was dead."

Surely this was the same story, with a different ending?

"He had not been crushed," Dr. Nagaraj said. "He somehow died of heart failure. I could not help him, yet I had brought the poor man to this place. Of course, I was devastated."

"Did he have a family?"

"No wife, no children. But parents are there."

"Life's so short," Beth said.

Dr. Nagaraj smiled. "No, no. Life continues. It flows. There is no end."

The next day, Dr. Nagaraj left a message tucked under their door, requesting a meeting at one o'clock in his office. He had never written to them before; his handwriting was severe and intimidating, and one was their lunch hour.

"What's this all about?" Audie asked.

They met him together, feeling importuned, then sheepish when it turned out that Dr. Nagaraj was only being helpful. Somehow he had discovered that Beth had been looking to buy a shahtoosh, perhaps more than one. Dr. Nagaraj said that he knew a certain man, but that it was not possible for this shahtoosh seller to enter Agni. It was not permitted.

"He is just a common hawker, you see. From the town."

"The town we keep hearing about," Beth said.

"Hanuman Nagar," Dr. Nagaraj said.

"How will we get there?"

"I will request a vehicle—a motorcar."

They met the car not in the circular drive but in a more circumspect way, at the Agni entrance. The old-fashioned white sedan was waiting, curtains on its windows, tassels dangling from the curtains. The Blundens got into the back seat, Dr. Nagaraj in the front with the driver, and they left Agni for only the second time in more than three weeks.

The road levelled off at a fork, the wider path continuing to descend, a narrower one traversing the slope. The car turned onto this narrower road, into the glaring afternoon sun, which dazzled them. They averted their eyes until they were in shadow again, the shadow of a row of roadside huts and shops, where there were plodding cows and two boys kicking a dusty blue ball.

This was the talked-about town, the town they had smelled and heard, the town of the smoke. And now that they were in it they could match the sounds to their sources—not just the laboring buses and trucks but the wailing of music, shrieking songs.

Dr. Nagaraj said nothing. The Blundens sat horrified, as they had been on the way from the airport, at the squalor, the crowds of people. They drew level with a bus stop where a rusty Tata bus was letting off passengers.

"What's that?" Beth asked.

Up ahead there was a pile of soot-blackened rubble inside the sort of walled courtyard she associated with holy places and private villas.

"Shrine," Dr. Nagaraj said.

"Are they tearing it down?"

"No. Building it up. Formerly it was mosque. Before mosque it was Hindu temple. Back to Hindu temple now."

Smoke swirled behind the fortified gates.

"Who are those people?"

"*Yatris.* Pilgrims. Holy people. They are venerating the site. Also some people protecting the site."

"Protecting it against whom?"

"*Goondas.* Rascals, and Muslims."

Now they could see occupiers and protesters, both sides carrying signs, all of them shouting.

"How can you tell they're Muslims?"

"Beards are there."

"Is this a problem?"

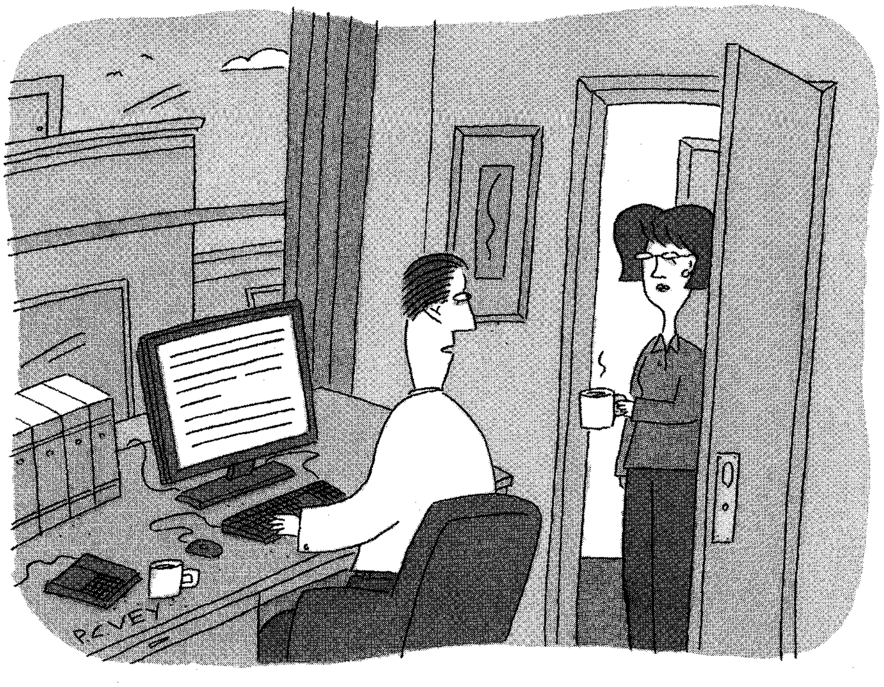
"It is situation," Dr. Nagaraj said.

"What if it gets out of hand?"

"Not possible. Although this is a Muslim area, so to say, Muslim people are outnumbered in this town. This is historic town. This town is mentioned favorably in Atharvaveda. This is Hanuman town, where he seized mountain of medicinal herbals to heal the sickly Lakshman."

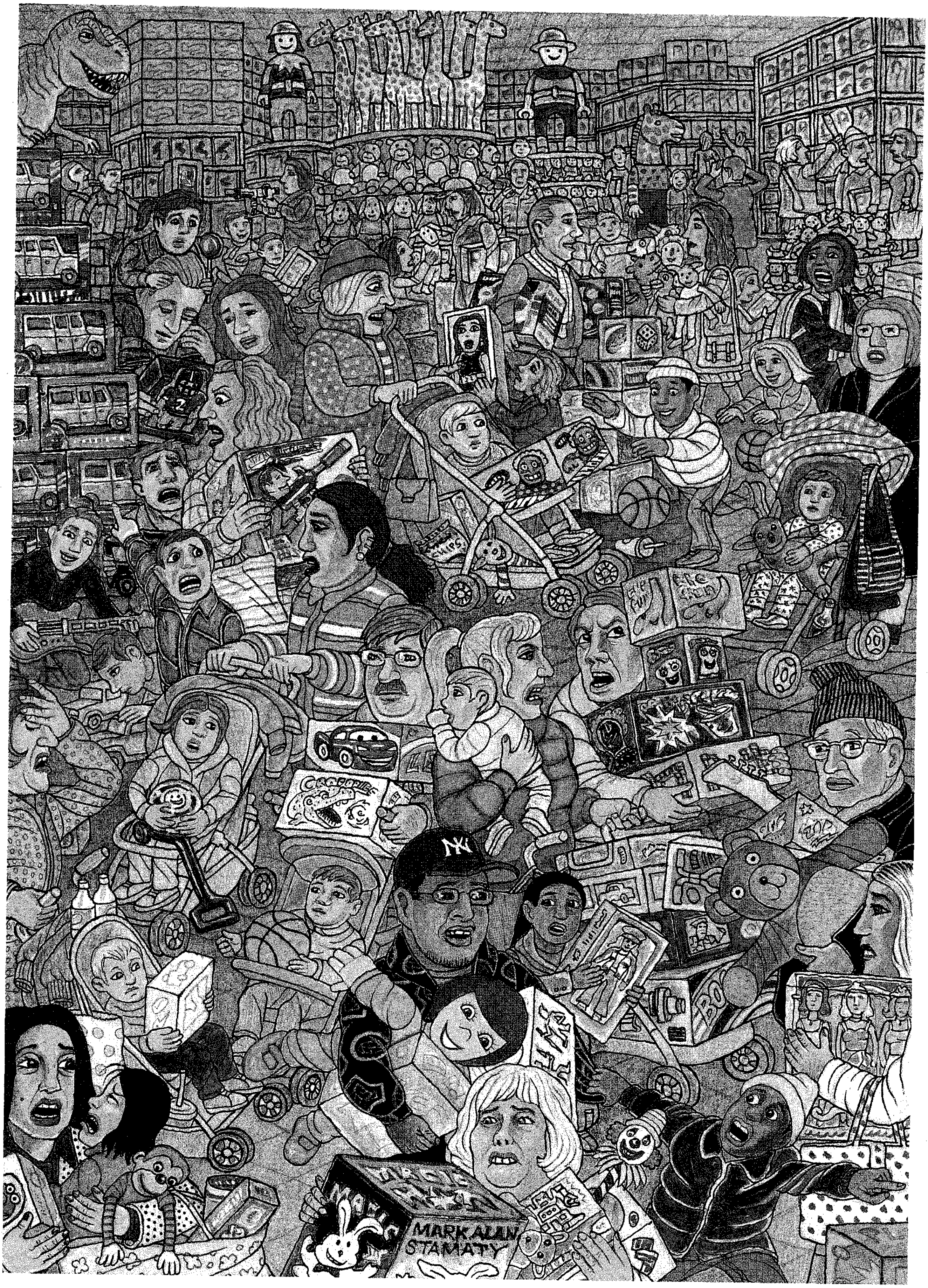
As he lectured them, Beth saw that a detachment of uniformed policemen had lined up and were holding four-foot sticks against a crowd of men—the men who were shouting and shaking their fists at another group of men inside the enclosure, where a bonfire blazed.

"I think I mentioned how I led my friend among the elephants," Dr. Nagaraj said, hardly seeming to notice the



"I just feel fortunate to live in a world with so much disinformation at my fingertips."

HOLIDAY SHOPPERS BY MARK ALAN STAMATY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people peering into the car, the motorcycles and handcarts vying for space on the road, or their own furiously honking driver.

"I seem to recall it," Audie said.

Beth was only half listening. She could feel the tension of the town in her body like a cramp; she could smell it and taste it. It was dreadful and disorderly, yet she was roused by its truth, as if by the revelation of something that had been hidden from her. It was India with the gilt scraped off, hungry India, the India of struggle, India at odds with itself.

"I was devastated," Dr. Nagaraj said. He was still talking about his friend, dead among the elephants. "I could not stop sobbing at his funeral."

They had come to the shop. Beth could see the stack of shahtooshes on the counter, the welcoming shopkeeper pushing people aside so that they could alight. They entered the shop and were shown to plastic chairs. The shopkeeper then pulled a wooden shutter closed, as though to conceal the transaction. With some ceremony, he unfolded a shahtoosh and presented it to Beth to admire. Before she could register her pleasure, he gave her another one.

"His grandmother took me aside. She said, 'Do you know the story of Vishnu, who rode on the great bird Garuda to the House of the Gods?' "

"Feel—*chiru*," the shahtoosh seller was saying, unfolding one piece after another, draping some of them on the counter and thrusting others into Beth's hands.

" 'As Vishnu and Garuda entered the House of the Gods they saw a small bird at the gateway. The Lord of Death also entered, and he smiled at the little bird. Garuda was so shocked at this he seized the little bird in his beak and took him fifty kilometres away, to save him from the Lord of Death.' And by the way," Dr. Nagaraj said, "these are first-quality shahtoosh. Made from chin hairs of very rare Tibetan antelope. Woven in Kashmir."

Audie said, "Is that the end of the story? The little bird was saved?"

In their experience, Dr. Nagaraj never said yes or no. He considered Audie's question and said, "When ultimately they left the House of the Gods, Vishnu said, 'Where is the little bird?' "

Dr. Nagaraj had turned his back to the Blundens and was speaking into the shadows of the shop, where a naked child was slapping the tiles with a plastic cup.

"Before Garuda could reply, Lord of Death said, 'I smiled to see little bird here, because he was supposed to be fifty kilometres away, to meet his death.' "

Hearing this, Beth was stricken, as though Dr. Nagaraj had pinched her, and without thinking she said, "We must be going." She was overcome by the mustiness of the shop, the incense that seemed a mingling of perfume and cow shit, the imploring shahtoosh seller, and, within earshot, the yells of the men at the shrine. She picked up two scarves and said, "I'll take these two."

"I told him you are not tourists, you are *yatris* yourselves, doing *puja* at Agni."

"That's us," Audie said.

"I will deal with money. You know it is some thousands of dollars?" Dr. Nagaraj said. "You can pay me later. I will find you in the car."

They made their way to the car through the crowd that had gathered to gape at them. Dr. Nagaraj got into the front seat and they were soon driving back up the main street of the cracked and littered town.

"How long has this mob scene been going on?" Audie asked.

"Some years now."

Audie inquired in a reasonable voice, "Would you mind explaining your story? Maybe I'm stupid, but I don't get it."

"Listen, my friend. Grandmother of Sanjeev said to me, 'Don't be sad. Garuda guided the little bird to his death unknowingly, as you guided Sanjeev. You were *meant* to deliver him.' "

They continued the rest of the way to Agni in silence. Then, as the car slowed at the gate, Dr. Nagaraj began speaking again. " 'Maybe this is your purpose in world,' she said. 'To guide people to their fate. You are vehicle.' "

On the way to the lodge, Audie asked the cost of the scarves. Dr. Nagaraj seemed relieved, and smiled as the money was counted into his hand.

"A great bargain, sir. And you are so lucky. This antelope is almost extinct."

"Amazing story, eh?" Audie said, once they were back in their room.

She stared at him.

"About that guy Sanjeev. The Lord of Death. Kind of an 'Appointment in Samarra' thing."

Beth said, "I didn't know what he was talking about. Anyway, didn't you say he was a quack?"

"I like that he could talk a dog off a meat wagon," Audie said. "And I sometimes think I'm a quack, a phony."

She stared at him again, distancing herself with a smile.

He said, "Don't you ever think that?"

"About you?"

"About yourself." Normally he became hot and impatient when he had to clarify something obvious to her, but he wasn't impatient now; he was sympathetic and mild.

"No," she said.

Now it was early afternoon. She was reading by the pool, on the platform under the trees, hidden by a hedge from anyone who happened to be in the chaise longues—but there was no one there, or in the pool. Audie was at a treatment. She had ordered a lemonade and a grilled-vegetable sandwich, but had only sipped at the drink.

With a thump, something landed behind her, the sandwich was snatched, and she flinched, raising her arms, and saw a monkey bound away. In her instant memory it was a monkey, but, at the moment of muddled confrontation, she had glimpsed the thing as a hairy, hostile child, and she was too panicked to scream.

After leaping into the biggest of the trees, the monkey found a branch, grasped it with his feet, and began to gnaw at the sandwich, scattering vegetables. These were seized by other monkeys, maybe a dozen, big and small, more insolent than afraid, with a malevolent patience, a defiance that she identified—just a hunch, something about the set of their jaws, the biting faces—as the courage of hunger.

They moved toward her without a sound, scarcely seeming to touch the deck boards in their tumbling, noiseless flowing, their faces twitching. She opened her mouth to shout but could not make a sound.

Their hair prickled on her body, scraped at her legs. They grabbed more of the loose vegetables that were lying on the deck, poked them into their mouths, yet kept their eyes on her. She felt that they wanted to eat her face, push her legs apart, squat on her breasts and stink.

She covered her face with one arm, flung her other arm across her breasts, and went numb from the waist down, as if in a dream where she found her legs crippled.

Then there was the crack of something landing in their midst—a heavy clattering stick—and the monkeys fell back. Then another stick with a thump as a man hurried past Beth, shouting, "Shoo! Shoo!" Holding his sandals in his hands, the man waved his arms, still shouting, physically thrusting the creatures away, into the trees, finally picking up the sticks he had thrown and flinging them again, until at last the monkeys were out of sight.

"Don't worry, Madam," the man said, turning to her. He was young, hardly a man, in white pants and a white smock. He looked beautiful. "They are very bold," he said. He retrieved his sandals and slipped them on. He was smiling—lovely teeth, great confidence, not fazed at all. Audie would have been gasping.

She made a grateful sound, meant to be "Thank you," but it was just a nervous exhalation.

"You see, they have been around humans for so long they have lost their fear. They are used to being fed by hand, at the temple in town—they are like little gods, spoiled children, you can say. Are you all right, Madam?"

"Where did you come from?" Beth said, with difficulty.

"Hanuman Nagar."

"No, no," she said. She rephrased the question. "Were you watching them?"

"I was watching you, Madam."

He faced her squarely, not smiling, looking intently at her.

"Thank you."

He did not blink. He said, "Since you arrived at Agni, I have not stopped watching you."

That made her pause; she was at a loss to reply. "I don't know how to thank you," she said. "Please take this," and she reached into her bag by the chair and took out some rupees. They felt like cloth in her hand they were so worn.

"Oh, no, Madam," the young man said, and put his hands behind his back in a prim gesture.

"Isn't there anything?"

"Yes." He was quick—already he had control of the situation. "You can request me."

"Request you?"

"For treatment," he said. "Ask for Satish."

The slow drip of hot oil on Audie's back, the pressure and heat, suggested her fingertips, and when she drizzled the oil in widening circles it was as though she were caressing him. She did not say much, hardly spoke unless he asked a direct question. Yet the confident intelligence in her hands moved down his back, a wise inquiry in the motion of her fingers. She was able by touching him to find parts of his body that, until that moment, were unknown to him. Her insinuating hands awakened a knotted muscle, rested on it, and pushed, giving it life.

"That's nice."

Anna paired her thumbs and pushed again.

"You are having this in America, sir?"

"Doubt it."

She went silent. Perhaps she hadn't understood his grunt. She worked harder still on the muscles next to his spine.

"I would like to go to America. Where is your home, sir?"

He did not say, as he usually did, "That's a hard question. We've got a place in Florida, an apartment in New York, a house in Maine . . ."

"I'm from Boston," he said. "Near Boston."

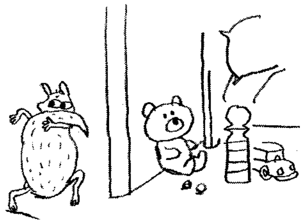
"Boston Tea Party. Boston Red Sox. Boston beans."

He laughed into his towel, then raised his head and asked, "Ever been outside of India?"

"Only to Delhi, sir. School trip, sir."

That reminded him of how young she was. He said, "You could probably make a lot of money in the States. Doing massages."

"But also to meet people, sir. To be happy, sir. To be free, sir."



"You're free here, aren't you?"

"No, sir. Not free. It is very hard here for me. As I mentioned, I am Christian, sir."

She was now working on his right arm. She had begun on his shoulder, squeezed and pressed her way to his wrist and was massaging his palm and, one by one, his fingers. Her manipulating his fingers he found like an act of the purest friendship, more sensual, more intimate, as she pushed and pulled, than her touch on any other part of his body. Take my hand, he thought. It meant everything.

"Wouldn't you be afraid to be in the United States alone?"

The way she touched him told him that she was thinking. "Maybe I will find someone to look after me."

"Give you money, you mean?"

"I will earn it, sir."

He asked, "What would you do?"

"I can do so many things, sir."

"What makes you so sure?"

"I have training, sir."

"Lots of girls have training."

"But my training, sir, is not in school."

"Experience?"

"Yes, sir. Best teacher, sir."

She caught his fingers and brushed them against her body, he could not tell where, perhaps her breast or her smooth cheek.

He was aware that he had had this conversation many times in his life, the flirting, the allusion, the euphemism, in his earliest talks with girls, as a boy of twelve or thirteen, and almost fifty years on, the same innuendo, the same themes—the language of suggestion, never quite coming to the point yet always knowing what the point was. He delighted in this inexplicit talk.

"Sir?"

"Yup?"

"Please turn over, sir."

"Not just now."

She sighed in approval. She knew that he was aroused and embarrassed. He could not turn over without exposing himself, bulging against the covering.

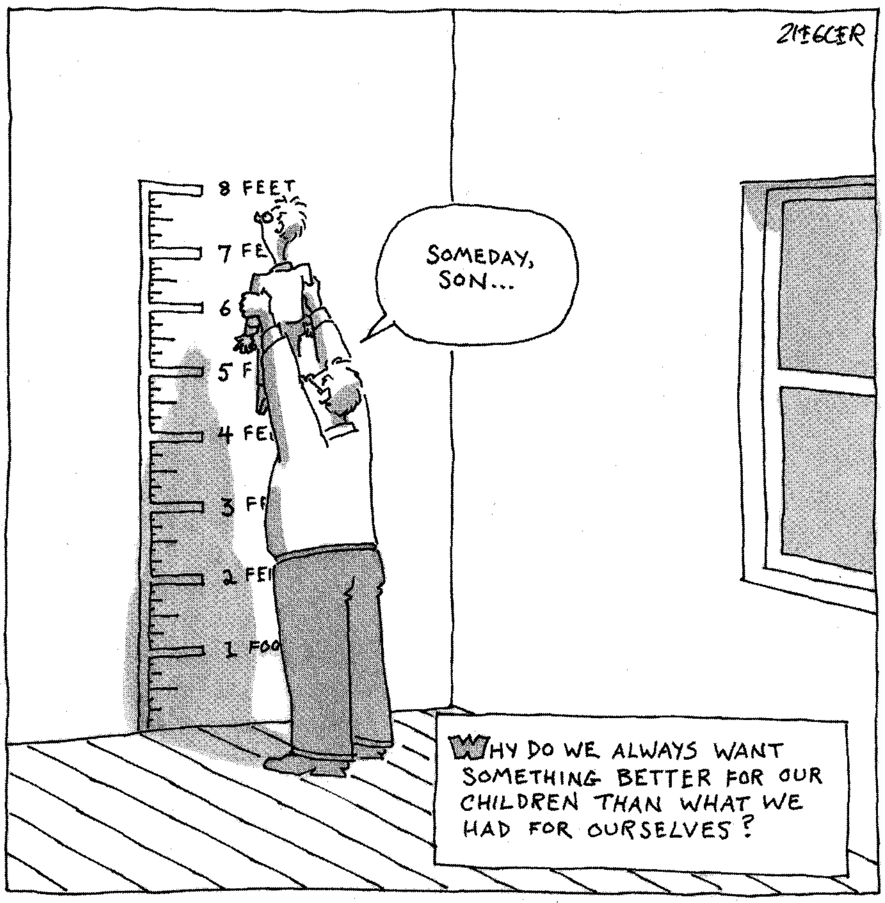
"That is all right, sir." She was trying to be serious.

"Give me a minute. I'm happy."

"I want to please you, sir."

"You're doing fine."

"Thank you, sir." She leaned against his back, as though embracing him,


ZIEGLER
8 FEET
7 FE
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5 F
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2 FE
1 FOO
SOMEDAY, SON...
WHY DO WE ALWAYS WANT SOMETHING BETTER FOR OUR CHILDREN THAN WHAT WE HAD FOR OURSELVES?

but using her elbow, her forearm, her fists on his packed muscles. When he was facing away from her, she seemed bolder.

"Did you learn that in school?"

She did not hesitate, she pressed harder, her whole body upon him.

"No, sir." He could tell she was smiling. "In life, sir."

For a few days, Audie and Beth found reasons to be busy, to remain apart at the very times when, a week earlier, they would have been punctually together, at the pool, in the restaurant, in their suite, at yoga, awaiting a treatment, poking golf balls across the putting green, side by side.

Now, "I guess I just missed you," Beth would say, as a way of explaining her all-afternoon absence.

"That's O.K.," Audie would reply. "I was tied up longer than I'd expected."

Each was grateful for the other's casualness; the fact that they did not need to explain their absences to each other kept them ambiguous, almost without meaning, as they'd been over the years when, late coming home from the office, Audie had said, "I was held up." On many of those occasions he'd been with a woman—his secretary, or someone from the company, or the wife of an employee.

Beth, in her absences, which were mostly for treatments, wanted to be touched. And in the hours in between she needed to be alone, to reflect on being touched, held, caressed, and whispered to, even if the words were only "Please relax your arm" or "Please turn over for me" or "Is it too hard, Madam?"

She found that she could not pass easily from the intimacy of the treatment room to a meal or a drink with Audie. With Audie, she would have felt vulnerable and slightly ridiculous. But when she was alone there was something delicious in her reverie—no one to judge it, nothing to measure it by. It was almost like the fantasy of a virgin.

Still, she did nothing to encourage Satish—in fact, she resisted him. With the sort of impatient clumsiness that he'd used against the wild monkeys, he offered her all sorts of invitations. First, she pretended not to understand, then she flatly refused. Yet why did even her refusals make her flush with guilt? Perhaps because she had never before kept a secret from Audie? And none of her refusals had been so strong as to discourage the boy. As the days passed, Satish became more familiar, which was his way of being persistent.

One day, as she stood in her robe before a massage, the blinds half drawn, he raised his hands and said, "Moment, Madam."

Satish assumed the lotus position, and then, twining his legs and falling backward, hauled himself up in a series of specific but fluid moves, tipped forward onto his forearms, supporting his head and whole body, and raised his legs until they were vertical. Finally, he lowered his legs over his back and lifted his neck, so that his feet touched his face.

"*Vrischikasana*," he grunted through his wiggling toes.

"I've seen that in circuses," Beth said.

"Scorpion pose."

He was, she realized, trying to impress her, and his effort made her smile.

"You see this watch?" he said another day.

She looked, but she could not tell the make; it was plump, and it seemed absurdly technical.

"Chronometer," he said, pressing the protrusions at its edges. "Timer, digital readout. Twistable bezel. Totally waterproof. Immersible for two hundred metres. Self-winding."

"I thought it was a bracelet."

"Is also jewelry. Valuable!"

"You're not supposed to wear that when you do massages, are you?" Beth took him by the hand and turned his wrist over and squeezed the watchband, plucking open its fastener, slipping it off. "Isn't that better?" She had touched him for the first time.

He looked chastened as he ducked outside to allow her the privacy to slide beneath the sheet on the massage table. But in the half-dark of the room, on his return, he was confident again, working on her shoulders, breathing softly against her neck.

"Have a nice night," he said to her when the massage ended.

It seemed like an inquiry. She said, "What do you do at night?"

"I repair to my house. Reading to im-

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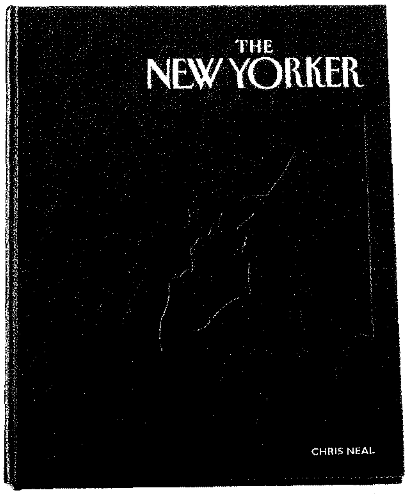

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prove education. Yoga to improve body and mind. Also painting."

"You paint pictures?"

"Classical painting," he said. "Indian gods and goddesses."

What made her feel awkward was that she knew, before he said another word, where this entire conversation was going, the next elements of it, her questions, his responses, and how in a matter of minutes it would end. And she had started it.

"Lovely," she found herself saying. "It sounds lovely."

"Painting with brush. Making pictures for *puja*." He wobbled his head, a misleading movement she now understood as affirmative.

"You're a man of many talents."

She was glad that no one could hear these predictable phrases and clichés. It was as though she were reciting dialogue that someone else had prepared for her. Perhaps all love affairs began like this, as repetition, as mimicry. Yet she wanted to believe that the feeling was real and originated within her.

It was better not to say anything, better just to smile, to give nothing a name. In spite of this, another line came to her. "I'd like to see them."

"Yes, please."

"Maybe sometime."

"Madam, tonight."

Against her will, she found herself agreeing, and afterward, avoiding Audie at the pool, she felt excited, thrilled, yet jittery, like a girl.

Satish had said that he'd meet her below the laundry building, which lay on the path that wound down to the main road into Hanuman Nagar. After dinner, she told Audie that she was going up to the spa, but instead ducked into the bamboo grove and walked quickly through the thick flowering trees into the smoky air that rose from the town.

A person thrusting a broomstick at her rose up on the road and caused her to gasp.

"Madam."

"Who are you?"

"*Chowkidar*, Madam."

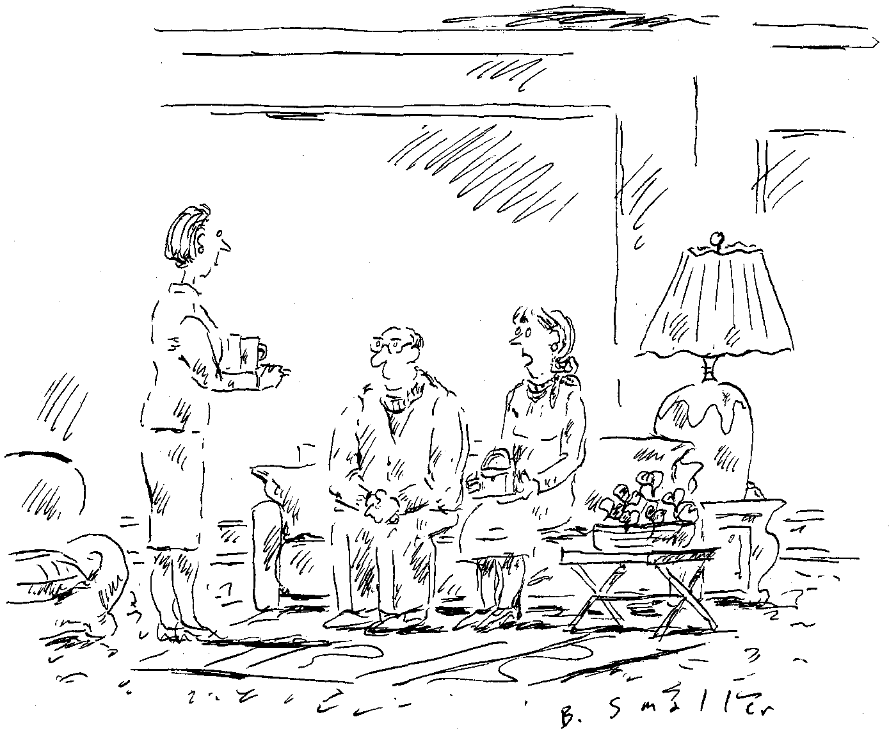
"What do you want?"

Fright made her severe, and her severity made the man deferential.

He said, "Protection only, Madam."

His mildness calmed her. She found some rupees in her pocket—in the darkness she could not tell how much—and handed the notes to the watchman. He touched them to his forehead and bowed to let her pass.

The downward path was so narrow



"Donald is such a fatalist—he's convinced he's going to grow old and die."

that her shoulders brushed the bushes on either side. The sense that she was leaving one world for another was palpable. Where she'd thought she saw a monkey squatting on its heels, a man stood up. She was too startled to scream; her hands flew up to protect her face. Then she saw that it was Satish.

"Not to worry," he said.

Rattled, she said, "I can't stay long."

"It is near," he said, placing a finger on her elbow to steer her, and when she reacted he said, "Sorry!"

His touch made her stumble, the path here littered with loose stones. He was still apologizing as they passed behind a shop, a wall that reeked of urine, and came out onto the road. In the distance, she saw the shopfronts of Hanuman Nagar, merchandise hanging in doorways, and the fires at the monkey temple—men waving torches, chanting, the line of policemen holding sticks.

"Cart Road," Satish said, blocking her way as a truck went slowly past in gusts of diesel fumes.

She followed him, her head down, walking just above the gutter and the storm drain, thinking, This is insane.

"I have to go back," she said, and felt even more like a girl, but a foolish one.

"It is just here," he said, fluttering his fingers into the middle distance.

All she saw were small yellow windows, like lanterns hanging in darkness, faces at some of the windows, and the blue flicker of TV sets. At one doorway, she smelled meat grilling, the sputter and hiss of hot snapping fat.

Satish must have smelled it, too. He said, "Muslim people. Many here. This we are calling"—he was pointing at Monkey Hill but the sweep of his arm seemed to take in the whole province—"Muslim belt."

She said, "I can't go any farther."

"We have arrived," he said, and led her up a path of broken paving stones, past a small astonished girl in a bright-pink dress dawdling by a lit doorway, past a padlocked shed, to a door latch, which he manipulated, pushing the door open. Beth stepped inside quickly, fearing to be seen, and was at once suffocated by the smell of cooked food, steaming on a low table.

"Bhaji," Satish said, lifting the lid of a tin pot. Then more lids up and down, "Mung dhal. Uttapam. Bindi. Naan bread. Rice."

"Very nice," Beth said, overcome by the heat, the stifling aromas, and a distinct smell of turpentine.

"Curd," Satish said, offering her a dish of crudded yogurt.

"I really must go back," she said.

"Madam," he said. "Take some food."

"I'm not hungry," she said, and remembered from a book on India that it was considered offensive to refuse food in an Indian household, but that a small symbolic mouthful was all that was necessary. She said, "But some of that curd would be delicious. Just a touch."

He spooned some into a bowl and handed it to her, saying, "Sit, please, Madam. A drink. Hot tea. Juices. Cool water."

She was rechecking the position of the door, preparing her exit, when she saw an assortment of foot-high paintings propped on a shelf, under a bare light bulb.

"No, thank you. Are those your pictures?"

She was still standing, eying the door. He went to the paintings and selected a highly colored one of a fat naked baby attended by a smiling chubby-cheeked woman in a yellow sari.

"Bal Krishna," he said. "Krishna baby. Mother Yashoda."

Moving closer to the shelf, she saw other pictures she had taken to be animals, yet some of them had human features in spite of their snouts and multiple arms.

"Ganesh. Hanuman. Durga. I do with brush. Classical."

"Superb. Thank you. Now I must go."

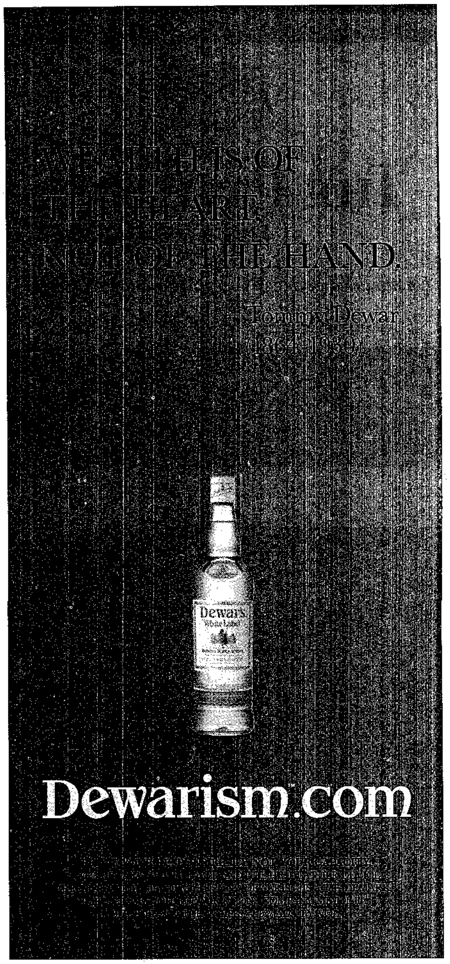
But as soon as she turned and found the latch and got the door ajar he was next to her, embracing her, pressing himself against her, whinnying, "Madam. Madam."

"I don't feel at all well," she said.

"I have aspirin, Madam." His hands and fingers flexed on her waist, as though testing its pliability.

But now she had got the door open, and the night air had a chilly smell of dirt and wood smoke that clung like grime to her face and arms.

Just a few feet down the path, the



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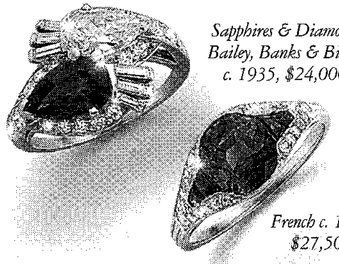
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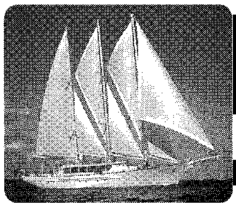
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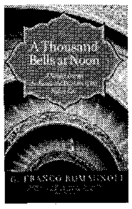

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small girl in the pink dress gaped. Satish had pursued Beth, but when he saw the little girl he hesitated, seemingly overcome, and dropped his arms to his sides, gathering his hands into his pajama top as though in a reflex of shame.

Without a word, moving efficiently in fear, Beth stepped along the walkway and fled into the road, keeping her head down when car headlights passed her. She looked back several times, to make sure that she was not being followed.

She slipped into the suite with the stealth of a burglar, and called out "Audie?" But there was no reply. The suite was empty.

In the darkness outside the Agni enclosure, the smell was more apparent. Audie had stood there just at nightfall, watching the sun drop as though dissolving into the depths of dust and haze that lay in thick bars above the horizon, obliterating the mountains. Rising around him was the sharp smell of dry trees, the dander of grubby monkey fur, boiled beans, burned meat, foul water, until the darkness itself seemed to stifle him.

Had Beth not announced that she was getting an evening treatment, he would not have come. But impulsively he had called Anna's cell phone and, as though expecting his call, she had given him explicit directions. Six-thirty sharp.

"Excuse me, sir."

Her voice came out of the darkness. She was walking toward him, and she emerged as though materializing before him like a phantom.

"I didn't see you coming. Don't you have a flashlight?"

"A torch, sir, yes. But not necessary now."

She did not want to be seen. That was a sign of her seriousness. And Audie summed her up quickly: she is meeting me secretly; she thinks she knows what I want; she is willing to coöperate. All this was obvious in her unwillingness to use a light. Artful, he thought, but even I don't know what I want.

"Your cell phone works pretty well on the hill."

"My mobile, sir. Guest Services provides. Sometimes we are on call for night treatments."

"Is that what this is?"

Anna laughed, snuffling nervously. "I don't know, sir."

"Where's your flashlight, honey?"

"Here, sir."

He groped for it, found her warm hand, took the flashlight, and switched it on, hoping that the light would drive away the smell. It seemed to work; as soon as he could see the stony path, he could breathe more easily.

"Where are we going?"

"My friend's flat, sir."

"In the woods?"

"Not woods, sir. Residential Civil Lines."

"Where do you live, Anna?"

"Staff block, sir. Hostel, sir."

"You keep saying 'sir.' "

"Yes, sir," and she giggled, her hand over her mouth.

Audie was careful not to touch her, though she was walking just in front of him, on the steep downward path toward the glare of some sulfurous lights. He saw a three-story squarish building, the smell of rotting clothes lingering near it.

"Is that it?"

"It is, sir."

But he had stopped. He'd lost the momentum he'd had in the darkness on the path above.

"In here, sir."

He took a step toward her. He reached and put his arm around her. She was tense. She seemed to quail, holding her face away from him yet presenting her hips. Her bare belly was soft like a cushion of bread dough in his hand. She was breathing hard.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, sir. I am all right, sir." He could tell that she was willing; he could also tell that she was terrified. "Let we go inside, sir?"

Audie took a deep breath and, expelling it, slackened his grip on her. Aware that he was still holding her lightly, he became self-conscious and let go. He felt in his pocket for his wallet, which was fat with rupees, and without looking at the denominations—he carried only five-hundred-rupee notes—he took out a thickness of them and pressed them into her hand.

"This is for you."

"Thank you, sir."

Not only did she accept the money,

she seemed relieved. Her whole body relaxed.

"You're a good girl. I want you to stay that way."

"Thank you, sir. Bless you, sir."

She giggled a bit, and drew another deep breath as she watched him back away up the path.

Beth was in the room when Audie returned. He was so sheepish from his errand that he did not notice how Beth held her book to shield her face—did not see her apprehension, he was himself so apprehensive.

"I wasn't very hungry," he said.

"I just had a snack."

"Love ya," he said.

Waiting in the woods, standing in the darkness had tired him; walking all that way down the path to the isolated apartment block had exhausted him, too. And he was ashamed of himself—of the power he had had over the girl. She had been afraid. He hated himself for having put her in that position, obviously horrified at the prospect of sex yet willing to sacrifice herself for the money. In his exhaustion, he fell asleep, his mouth open, his harsh breath rising and falling.

He did not hear Beth slip out of her bed and dress quickly, did not hear the door click shut.

Beth hurried to the stairwell, moving carefully, out the front door, past the porte cochere, and across the night-damp lawn to the grove of bamboos. Guided by the risen moon, she found the path to the laundry, and behind it the path to Hanuman Nagar.

"Madam! *Chowkidar*, Madam."

The night watchman was on his feet, saluting with one hand, his flashlight in the other showing her the way.

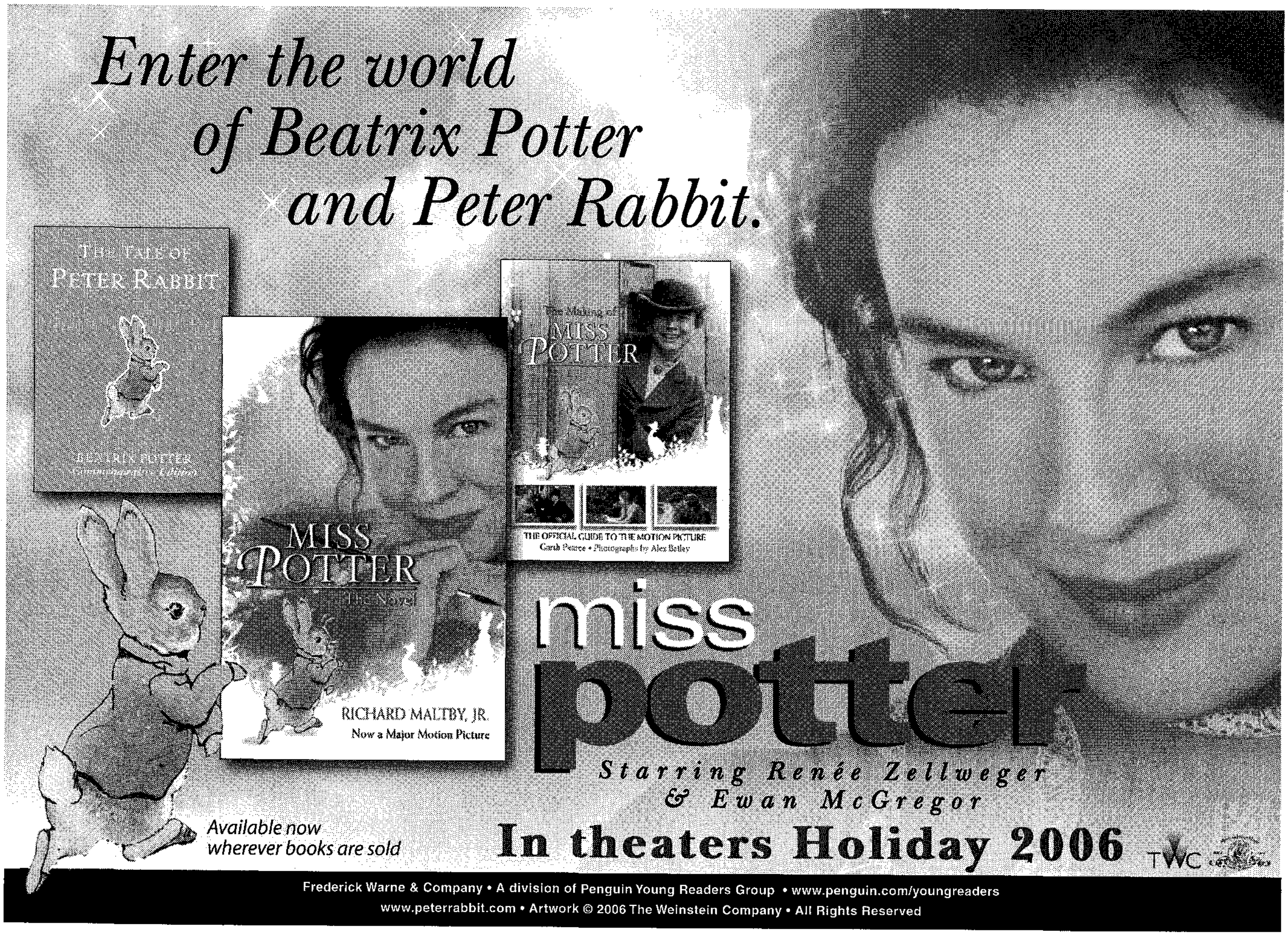
Everything seemed easier now that it was an exercise of her will and not a stumbling in the darkness. The downward path lit by the fluorescence of the moon seemed much shorter, and ahead the main street of the town was empty. Two or three men hunkered on their heels, warming their hands at a flaring brazier; some others she passed slept on the sagging rope beds they'd been squatting on earlier in the evening. The temple at the curve in the road was silent, just a few torches burning.

She found the alley, stepped over the monsoon drain, smiled at the doorway where the little girl had been and was no more, and at the latched door in the whitewashed wall she tapped lightly.

A murmur came from inside, a word—but not an English word. She was aware of the twitching of curtains at the window. Then the sliding of a rusty bolt, the now familiar smell of food.

"Oh, thank you," he said.

They were up early for yoga, seated on their mats in the pavilion before anyone else arrived. Their eyes were closed, they were listening to the slight breeze brushing at the willows, the twitter of birds, distant voices, feeling—as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"Wiles of the Devil or not, someone's gotta pay for these pies."

• •

Vikram urged every morning—the peaceful vibrations.

Hearing "*Namaskar*," they opened their eyes and saw that without their realizing it—for no one had spoken—the rest of the yoga class had gathered in the pavilion, eyes closed, waiting to begin.

"This *asana* is good for blood circulation," Vikram said. "For back. For bowels. *Tadasana*. Mountain."

As Beth elongated her body, reaching upward, her mind was travelling backward. Satish had held her tightly, even after she'd said, "I'm not going anywhere." He was repeating, "Thank you, thank you," and then he had led her somewhat roughly—perhaps it was just his impatience—to the corner of the room, onto the mat, and was pushing at her clothes and seeming to sob with urgency.

She had been at a loss—had no idea what was expected of her, was relieved simply to allow him to lift her clothes, to stroke her body, was even prepared to say, "Take me." But in his frenzy any talk was unnecessary. After fumbling with her clothes—it was as though he'd never touched buttons before—he'd snatched them off her and knelt to embrace her. She was surprised by his furious impatience.

"And down for crocodile posture," the yoga instructor was saying.

He had lain upon her just like this, lengthwise, his whole weight pressing her, one knee forcing her legs apart. His jaw was clenched, he was fierce, his breath sucked between his teeth.

"I am bad, I am vicious," he said, still sucking his breath. "I love you."

She twisted under him, feeling the bumping of his hips, and wanted to say, It hurts.

Afterward, he had said, "Sorry, Madam," and rolled to the side, leaving her naked and unsatisfied and assaulted—chafed and subtly bruised. But when she looked over at him his hands were covering his face and she felt sorry for him in his shame. He had all at once deflated.

At the door he had said, "What about present, Madam? Some few rupees?"

The encounter—briefer than she'd expected, one-sided, like a humiliating shove or a mild spanking—had left her lucid and a bit rueful. It had not been an act of possession—more one of rejection.

"Haven't I just given you something?" she said.

His voice going smoky and dark, he said, "I will see you tomorrow."

"Now, for rest, *savasana*," Vikram said. "Corpse pose."

They breakfasted as usual, choosing the Indian option, filling their plates with beans and curried vegetables and yogurt while the waiters held the lids of the tureens open.

Instead of becoming more familiar, friendlier, Indians became more formal, more solemn, like foot soldiers facing generals. Or was that just here at Agni?

"As you wish, Madam," one of the waiters said, bowing, in response to a request for more tea.

"It is my pleasure," another one said to Audie.

"They make you feel important," Audie said, yet he also sensed more distance than warmth in the politeness, and no one was smiling. "You going for a treatment?"

"I think I'll pass."

But Audie was eager—most of all eager to see what sort of reception he'd get from Anna, who owed him, he felt, unlimited gratitude. For hadn't he let her off the hook? He wanted to experience her grateful hands.

At the spa lobby, three of the staff, like male nurses in white uniforms, stood to attention as Audie approached. Audie smiled, thinking that if they had been wearing shoes instead of sandals their heels would have clicked.

"I'm here for my treatment."

"Have you booked, sir?"

"I'll take anything you've got."

"Nothing available, sir."

What struck Audie was that the young man had not even glanced at the thick bound appointment book that lay open on the desk.

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"Nothing, sir."

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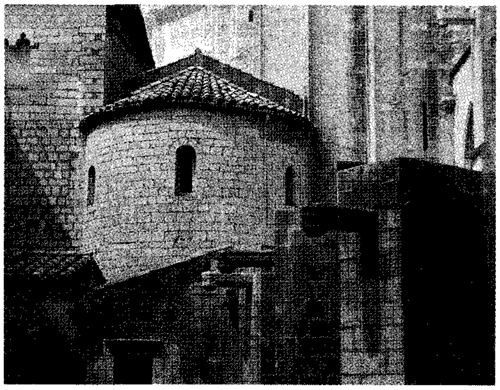
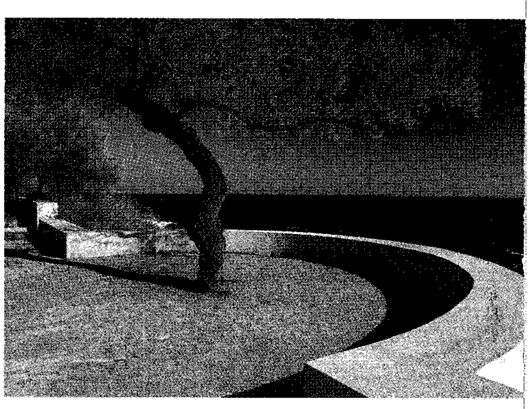




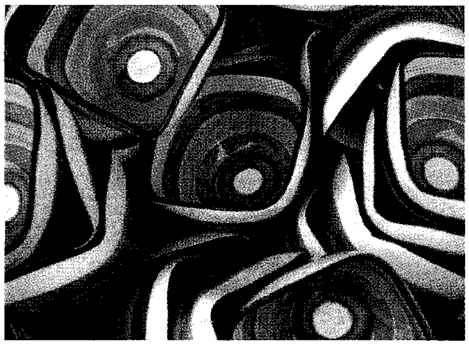
C*lonia's Romanesque Art & Architecture*

A thousand years ago, the great artisans of Spain—painters, metalworkers, sculptors, architects—toiled in Catalonia, creating immortal works of art and architecture. They carved elaborate sculptures from stone and wood, forged sacred objects using precious gems and minerals, painted frescoes, and created monumental structures.

Thousands of examples of their work, which flourished from about 1000 A.D. to 1300 A.D.—a time that came to be known as the Romanesque period—still stand in this beautiful region bordered in the north by the Pyrenees and to the east by the Mediterranean.

Catalonia's Romanesque treasure trove extends from churches and monasteries to castles and fortified houses, bridges, and civic buildings. There is even a circa-1264 *mikvah* in the medieval town of Besalú.

These ancient structures, which have survived time as well as modernization, are distinguished by several features. While Romanesque architecture is most recognizable for its symmetry, its use of masonry, and its sheer mass, elements that include decorative portal façades and rounded archways, carved reliefs, thick walls, barrel and groin ceiling vaults, and tall bell towers also identify the distinctive edifices.



Magnificent frescoes with religious themes were painted to complement the Romanesque architecture, and many fine examples have been preserved. The largest collection of Spain's priceless frescoes resides in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia and one of Europe's most dynamic cities.

The Catalan Department of Tourism can provide visitors with information on Romanesque sightseeing routes that traverse Catalonia's majestic mountain scenery. Sixty miles from Barcelona, the picturesque town of Cardona, which retains significant evidence of its historic past, is an excellent base for travelers to begin exploring the region's heritage. Its fortified hilltop contains the eleventh-century church of St. Vicenc, and an imposing thirteenth-century castle, once the home of Cardona's powerful dukes.

In the heart of Cardona's medieval district, the newly opened, nineteen-room Bremon Hotel (www.hotelbremon.com) offers guests a modern retreat. Stylish contemporary furniture and original etchings by Spanish artists decorate the rooms; the restaurant serves regional dishes made from in-season local products; and flatscreen satellite TVs and broadband Internet connections can bring visitors back to the present, although Catalonia's Romanesque past is certain to hold them in thrall.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: GOTHIC BUILDINGS IN GIRONA © NIKREATES/ALAMY; COSTA BRAVA COAST © TONI VILCHES/ALAMY; POTTERY © MICHAEL JENNER/ALAMY

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He said, "Anna—is she free?"

"Not here, sir."

"When will she get here?"

"Not at all. Not employed here anymore, sir."

Only this one man had done the talking—stonewalling was more like it. Audie sensed that the other two were watching closely for his reaction, but he did not smile until he turned away, thinking, That's it—take the money and run.

Later in the morning, Beth, curious about the route she'd taken the previous night, proud of her initiative (two times down the path to Hanuman Nagar: when in her life had she ever struck out alone like that?), wandered through the bamboo grove and the trees above the laundry, just to see where she'd been. Pretending to admire the jasmine that edged the walk, she worked her way to the path and saw the raw wood of a new fence, with a gate crudely wired to it.

"No entry, Madam."

A man in the khaki uniform of the grounds staff stepped from behind a bush to block her way. He held a shiny truncheon.

"I was just looking."

"Needing chit for passage. Having chit, Madam?"

"Who are you?"

"*Chowkidar*, Madam."

"This fence wasn't here yesterday."

"No, Madam. Put up today morning."

Testing him, she said, "What if I want to go to the laundry?"

"Not available." The man, still holding his truncheon, folded his arms over his chest.

She could see that the watchman was adamant, that her arguing with him would only give him a greater victory, something he clearly relished.

On her way back to the pool, rattled by the encounter, she passed the spa. Instead of the usual boy who received guests for treatments, she saw three men dressed in white, standing like sentries. Noticing her, one of them came to the door.

"Yes, Madam?"

Beth smiled. "Lovely day, isn't it?"

"You have booking for treatment?" He hadn't smiled back.

"Not today." She peered behind him. "Is that Satish?"

"No, Madam."

"You didn't even turn around. How are you so sure?"

"Satish is gone."

"What do you mean?"

"Charge-sheeted, Madam."

She smiled again, as though she'd understood. "Actually, I was just going to the pool."

Gone? All she could think was that he had somehow slipped away; that he was guilty of some sort of theft. He had asked her for money. Perhaps, with money on his mind, he had stolen something from the spa strongbox. Some guests paid for their treatments in cash; she had seen the stacks of rupees.

Over lunch, Audie and Beth sat hardly speaking, except to remark on the weather, the sun-flecked veranda, the flowering trees, the bolder birds raiding the leftovers at vacated tables.

The waiters came and went, refilling the water glasses, using tongs to put warm naan into their basket, and finally slipping the check to be signed into a plastic wallet and placing it near Audie's plate.

There were some people eating on the veranda whom Beth and Audie had never seen before at lunchtime. The large table near the far rail, for example, was occupied by two men in suits and ties, looking out of place, one of them talking to the manager, a man with an unpronounceable name with whom Audie renewed their booking every week.

When the waiter approached to pick up the signed lunch check, Audie put his hand over it to detain him.

"Who's that?"

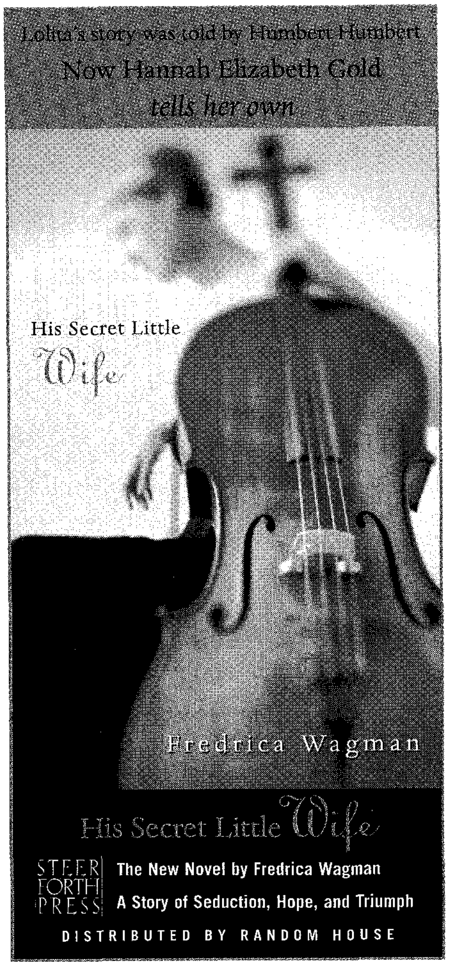
"Mr. Shah, sir. Owner of Agni, sir. And his managing partner. Also, as you know, Mr. Rajagopalachari, manager."

Audie smiled in the direction of the owner, this Mr. Shah, businessman to businessman, wishing for eye contact. But the man was still speaking, waving his hands, tapping on the table with his gold ring for emphasis.

"Another week, Tugar?" Audie said as they left the restaurant. They walked through the gardens and up the slope to the lobby of the main building to signal their intention to stay on.

The clerk they spoke to stood up at his desk and faced them. "You must see the manager, sir."

"He's at the restaurant," Audie said.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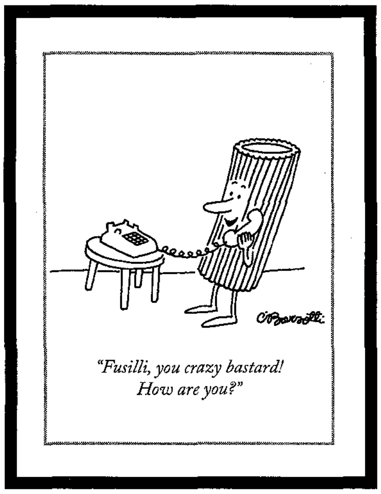
Leo Cullum, 1998


"Fusilli, you crazy bastard! How are you?"

Charles Barsotti, 1994

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"Yes, sir."

"So what do we do?"

"Come back later, sir."

They had a nap by the pool, in the shade of the overhanging trees, and at four, yawning, they made their way back up the slope.

A man they had never seen before met them on the stairs of the main building, greeting them but also obstructing their way.

"You're not the manager," Audie said.

"Acting manager."

"Where's the manager?"

"He has been put on indefinite leave," the man said. "How may I help you?"

"It's just, here we are again. We're staying another week."

The man's mouth tightened. He said, "Sorry, sir."

Audie said, "What do you mean?"

"Fully booked, sir. From tomorrow, sir."

"We've been doing this week to week. We've never had a problem. You can fix us up."

Beth added, "We'll take whatever you've got."

"Nothing available, sir." The man had begun to smile, which made his intransigence all the more baffling.

"The place is practically empty," Audie said.

"Departure tomorrow morning-time is eleven, sir. Bags will be picked up. Car will be waiting. Settle bill, sir. Paperwork, sir. All charges to date."

"You mean now?"

"If you please."

Audie handed over his credit card, and then sat with Beth in the garden, listening to the musicians who were playing in an open pavilion. Above the music, they heard loud voices, scolding, possibly the owner's voice—it was a tone they had never heard before at peaceful Agni. There were the sounds of scurrying, the whirr of golf carts coming and going, the important slamming of car doors. There was a suggestion of turbulence, turmoil, the sort of thing they'd seen in the lower world of Hanuman Nagar, but not here.

"Someone's getting his nose bitten off," Audie said. "Glad it's not me."

They skipped dinner and went to bed early—too early, perhaps, because neither of them could sleep. Beth kept seeing Satish's toothy face saying, "I will see you tomorrow," and now it sounded like a threat. Audie wondered what Anna was going to do with the money and regretted having given her so much. He had made that mistake before. They lay wakeful, face-saving in their separate beds, too chagrined to confide their feelings—yet they knew, without conferring, that they had been rebuffed. "Nothing available" was a lie, one of those obvious lies intended to humiliate you. Still, they were not so sorry to leave. It was India, after all, and they were headed home.

The morning was smokier than usual. A haze hung over Agni, seeming to rise from the town. They had expected one of the white Mercedeses from the Agni fleet to be waiting at the entrance, but saw instead a tubby black Ambassador parked in the porte cochere. The car's hood was secured with a piece of rope that dangled over the radiator grille. No driver in sight. They were used to a sendoff from luxury hotels. *Please do come back and see us again.* But here there was nothing.

As Audie began to complain, he heard Beth say, "Hello, stranger," in a grateful way.

Dr. Nagaraj had approached the car and was opening doors for them. Now Audie noticed that the car had side curtains, a flourish that made it look older and somehow grubbier.

"My vehicle," Dr. Nagaraj said.

"You're taking us?"

"Why not?"

"Where's the driver?"

"Not available."

Yesterday's lame excuse. And though Beth had already got into the back seat, Audie was puzzled. "I don't get it. Why no drivers?"

"They are lodging complaints about road conditions."

All these uncoöperative people and the sense of being banished made Audie cross; he showed it by seating himself next to Beth and slamming the door.

"I will drive you to the airport for the first Mumbai flight," Dr. Nagaraj said.

They could see from the way he clutched the steering wheel and labored with his forearms that he was a terrible driver, stamping on the brake, thumping the clutch, and mashing the gears. Audie mumbled, "Grind me a pound."

THE END OF THE WAR

He came at midnight, both legs lopped off,
though his old wounds had long since healed.
He came through the third-story window—
I was struck with wonder at how he got in.
We'd lived through an age of calamity;
many had lost their closest kin.
In streets sown with shredded papers
the orphan survivors were skipping about.

I was frozen as crystal when he came.
He thawed me like pliant wax,
altered me even as the pall of night
turns into the feather of dawn.
His bold spirit translucent as mist
that streams from the morning clouds.

—*Dahlia Ravikovitch*

(*Translated, from the Hebrew, by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld.*)

"Anyway, what's wrong with the road condition?" he said, louder.

"Main road is closed," Dr. Nagaraj said, riding the brake. "Blockage and stoppage. *Rasta roko*, we say."

"Is that unusual?"

"It is usual. People are angry because of Hanuman temple. Muslim people. That is the snag. The blockage is on the main road."

"Which way will you go?"

They were approaching the junction where the main road continued downhill and the road to Hanuman Nagar turned to the right, levelling off.

"Just here. Cart Road."

Beth recognized the name. "That's the road that goes past the temple. If there's a mob there, won't it be dangerous?"

"I will guide you," Dr. Nagaraj said.

Audie smiled at Beth and said, "Tugar, you actually know the name of this road?"

As he spoke, the road constricted and India seemed to shrivel around them, the stony slopes rushing up to the windows of the car, not just a pair of stray cows and the poorer shops at the edge of the town but a family of monkeys looking up from where they were picking through a garbage pile. This sense of walls closing in was made weirder by the absence of any people—not a single soul on a road that had been crowded with bikes and buses the last time they'd been on it, heading to the shahtoosh seller.

"Where is everybody?"

This empty road in India had the familiar desolation of a road in an absurd dream from which you woke up sweating.

Dr. Nagaraj, snatching at the steering wheel, rounded a curve, slowing down. A multicolored barrier lay in the distance, a head-high barricade.

No, it was a solid mass of men jammed together like a wall across the road. They were waving sticks, perhaps shouting, too, but there was no sound. The windows of the car were shut, and what the Blundens saw resembled the India they had seen from the car on their first day. But these men were bearded and angry, and the sunlight made it all much worse.

"Turn around!" Audie shouted.

Shocked into his own language, Dr. Nagaraj was yapping with fear. He slowed the car. He struggled with the steering wheel, attempting a U-turn. But the road was too narrow, and seeing that he could go no farther he began to jiggle the loose gearshift. When he looked back to reverse the car, his face was close to the Blundens, gleaming in terror.

"Get us the hell out of here!"

"Oh, God." Dr. Nagaraj winced at the pock-pock of stones hitting the car, the sound on its metal as of teeth and claws. ♦

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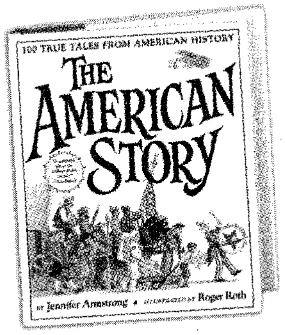
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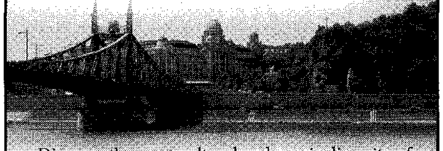

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THE ART OF EXTINCTION

The bleak laughter of Thomas Bernhard.

BY RUTH FRANKLIN

In 1988, to commemorate Austria's annexation by Adolf Hitler fifty years earlier, a new play was commissioned from Thomas Bernhard. The author of eleven novels and more than twenty plays, Bernhard had a well-deserved reputation as the country's most provocative postwar writer: he spent his career alternately mocking and mourning Austria's Nazi legacy, which, with typical bluntness, he once represented as a pile of manure on the stage. At first, he declined to participate in the commemoration, saying with caustic humor that a more appropriate gesture would be for all the shops once owned by Jews to display signs reading "Judenfrei." But the author of plays like "The German Lunch Table," in which family members gathered for a meal discover Nazis in their soup, could not resist such a rich opportunity to needle Austria's political and cultural élite. "All my life I have been a trouble-maker," he once wrote. "I am not the sort of person who leaves others in peace."

The scandal of "Heldenplatz," the verse drama that was Bernhard's contribution to the occasion, began well before opening night. The play takes its name from the Vienna square where cheering crowds greeted Hitler in 1938; that square also happens to be across from the Burgtheater, Austria's most prestigious theatrical institution, where the play was produced. The action revolves around the suicide of an Austrian Jew who, returning to Vienna after having fled during the Second World War, is dismayed to discover anti-Semitism still simmering in the country. After the press got hold of the script, which included lines such as "There are more Nazis in Vienna now / than in thirty-eight," politicians on the right, including Jörg Haider, called for the director's expulsion from Vienna. For the première, on November 4, 1988, the Burgtheater was put under police guard. At the play's finish, according to Bernhard's biographer Gitta Honegger, a "dissonant ovation" of "shouting, booing, clapping, and whistling" went on for forty-five minutes.

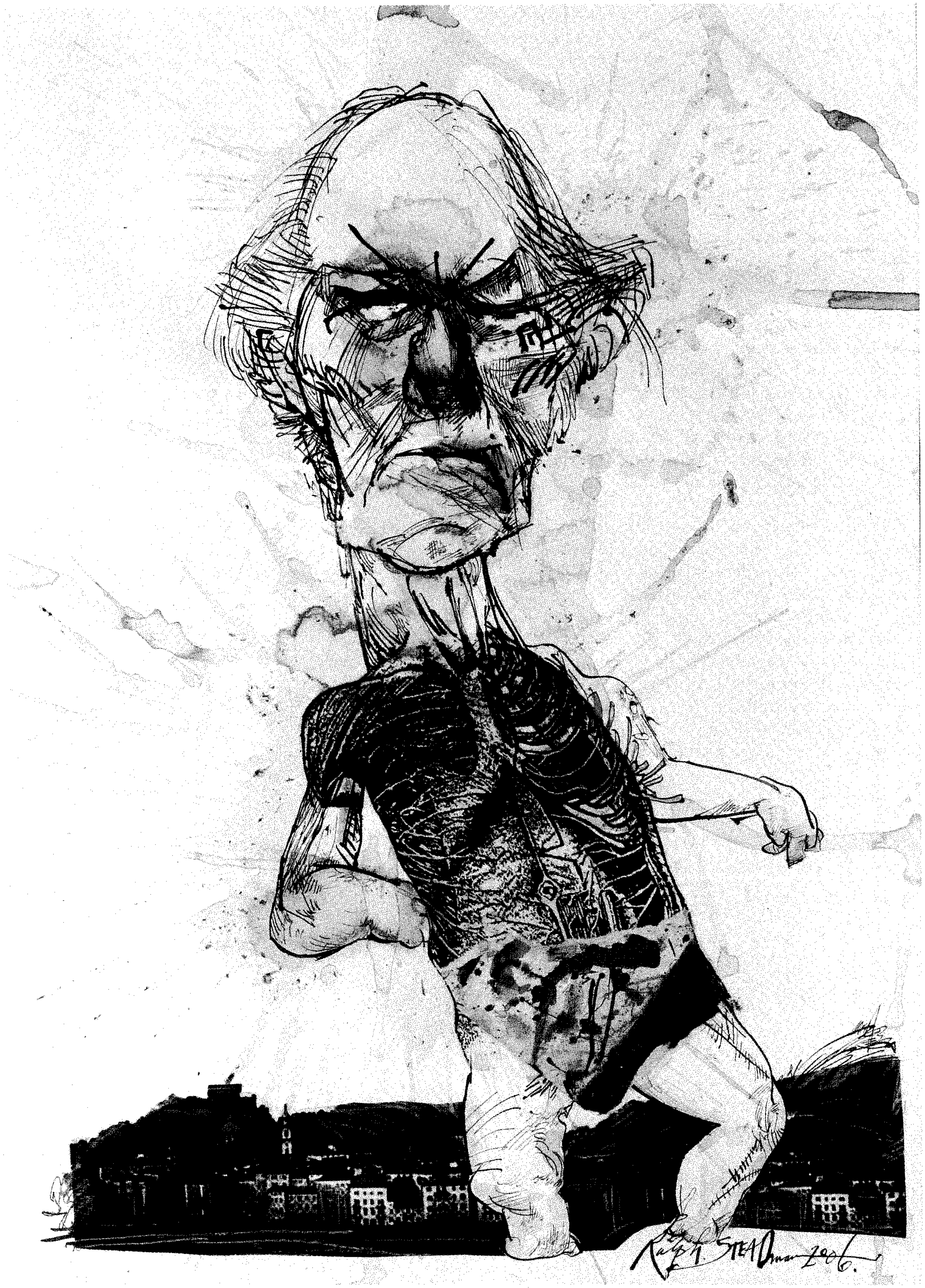
The hostility of the response surprised even the pugnacious Bernhard. Some of his friends said that the episode hastened his death, which occurred, by assisted suicide, three months later, when he was fifty-eight. (He had suffered from lung ailments since his teens, and spent the last decade of his life under constant medical supervision.) But he managed to have the last word. His will, released shortly after he died, forbade the publication, the production, or even the recitation in Austria of his works, "including letters and scraps of paper," for the next seventy years, the duration of their copyright. "I emphasize expressly that I do not want to have anything to do with the Austrian state and that I reject in perpetuity not only all interference but any overtures in that regard," he declared.

Bernhard's gesture of loathing toward the homeland that had miserably failed to appreciate him was also, of course, a masterly stroke of publicity, guaranteeing a storm of lawsuits as publishers and theatre administrators went to ridiculous lengths to circumvent the ban: the Vienna Festival mounted one of his plays in Bratislava, with buses chartered for the sixty-kilometre journey across the border. But one can also see it as the consummate prank of a satirist who, in the words of W. G. Sebald, found a dark humor in "the tension between the insanity of the world and the demands of reason." Sebald went on, "While the reader may not feel inclined to break into laughter on the basis of the material presented to him, it rings out all the louder behind the scenes of the work."

The past year has seen the publication in English, for the first time, of two of Bernhard's earliest works. Michael Hofmann has translated his first novel, "Frost" (Knopf; $25.95), which appeared in 1963, and James Reidel has translated a selection of his poetry, "In Hora Mortis/Under the Iron of the Moon" (Princeton; $14.95), dating from 1957. Read in the context of Bernhard's career, they reveal one of his most characteristic traits: a remarkable singlemindedness. Philosophically, there is no difference between the writing that Bernhard did in his twenties and his extraordinary late novels. All the elements of his intensely pessimistic world view—remorseless fury at a callous universe, lack of faith in human relationships, manic pursuit of aesthetic perfection—were likely set by the hardships of his youth. He was born February 9, 1931, in a Dutch clinic for unwed mothers. His mother had been working in Holland when she became pregnant, apparently as the result of rape. His father, a carpenter and petty criminal from Germany, never acknowledged him, and Bernhard always remembered the humiliation of having to undergo a blood test as a child to establish paternity. He was soon deposited in the care of his maternal grandparents, in Salzburg. His grandfather was an anarchist and a writer of pastoral novels, and Bernhard idolized him. He recalled the walks they took, during which his grandfather would extemporize about nature and philosophy, as "the only useful education I had." This idyll ended when Bernhard was six; his mother married and moved the family across the border to Germany.

The best account of Bernhard's early

RALPH STEADMAN


Ralph Steadman 2006.

Bernhard's youth left him with an immutably pessimistic world view and a loathing for his Austrian heritage.

life, if hardly the most reliable, is the autobiography he published, in five volumes, between 1975 and 1982. (It appeared in English in a single volume titled "Gathering Evidence," translated by David McLintock.) This work, which Bernhard describes as having been "assembled from hundreds and thousands of scraps of remembered experience," contains some of his most memorable and disturbing writing and some of his blackest humor. Bernhard, a chronic bed-wetter, was humiliated when his mother hung out his stained sheets for the neighbors to see. At school, he was even more miserable: the target of bullies, he particularly hated his compulsory membership in the Deutsches Jungvolk, a junior branch of the Hitler Youth, whose activities consisted of "constantly singing the same brainless songs and marching down the same streets yelling my head off." When he was eight, a social worker arranged to have him sent to a home for "maladjusted children," where he was shunned and denied meals; his only friend was a boy with deformed hands and legs, who received similar punishments.

In 1943, at the age of twelve, Bernhard was sent to a school in Salzburg, where he lived in a "filthy, stinking dormitory"—officially, a National Socialist Home for Boys—presided over by an "archetypal Nazi." Air-raid drills were soon taking place every day, and Bernhard witnessed people fainting and dying in the air-raid-shelter tunnels. "The streets were strewn with broken glass and rubble," he wrote, "and the air carried the distinctive smell of total war":

> An enormous cloud of dust hung over the ruined cathedral, and where the dome had been there was a great gaping hole the size of the dome itself. From the corner by Slama's [a clothing shop] we had a direct view of the great paintings which had adorned the walls of the dome and were now for the most part savagely destroyed, what remained of them standing out against the clear blue sky in the light of the afternoon sun. It was as though this gigantic building, which dominated the lower part of the city, had had its back ripped open and were bleeding from a terrible wound. . . . On the way to the Gstättengasse I stepped on something soft lying on the pavement in front of the Bürgerspital Church. At first sight I took it to be a doll's hand, and so did my companions, but in fact it was the severed hand of a child. It was the sight of this child's hand that quite suddenly transformed this first attack on the city by American bombers from the *sensation* it had been up to then—a sensation which produced a state of feverish excitement in the boy I was at the time—into an *atrocity*, an enormity.

After the war, Catholic priests replaced the school's Nazi administrators, but Bernhard continued to regard school as "a machine for the mutilation of my mind." At the age of fifteen, he quit and became an apprentice in a grocery store in a down-and-out neighborhood on the city's periphery. In contrast to his misery at school, Bernhard took great pride in his job; he seems to have had a knack for getting along with the customers, and particularly enjoyed their open, robust way of speaking, which helped to shape his digressive writing style. Inspired by his employer, a music lover, Bernhard began taking singing lessons with an opera singer; he was apparently very talented. But during the winter of 1949, after a bout of influenza, he was admitted to the hospital with a lung infection. It was the beginning of a lifetime of chronic illness. In the fourth volume of his memoir, "Breath: A Decision," he writes of a harrowing night spent in a way station for the nearly dead:

"Oh, love handles! We haven't had those in a while."

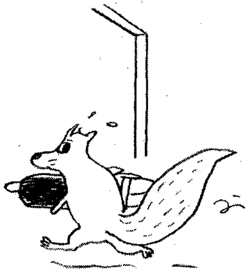
> Every half-hour a sister comes and lifts my hand, then drops it again. She probably does the same with a hand in the bed in front of mine, which has been in the bathroom longer. The intervals between her visits get shorter. At some stage men in grey enter the bathroom carrying a closed zinc coffin. They remove the lid and put a naked body inside, then replace the lid. I realize that the person they are carrying past me out of the bathroom in the closed zinc coffin is the man from the bed in front of mine. Now the sister comes only to lift my hand, to see whether she can still detect a pulse. Suddenly the heavy wet washing hanging on a line stretched across the bathroom and right over my head falls on top of me. A few more inches and it would have fallen on my face and smothered me. The sister comes in, grabs the washing, and throws it onto a chair beside the bath. Then she lifts my hand. All night she calls at various rooms, lifting people's hands and feeling their pulses. She starts stripping the bed, the bed in which someone has just died. She throws the covers on the floor and then lifts my hand again, as though waiting for me to die. Then she bends down, gathers up the covers, and goes out with them. *Now* I want to live.

While recuperating, Bernhard contracted tuberculosis. The last volume of the memoir is a gruesome report of his treatment—including a botched procedure during which his doctor collapsed the wrong lung—and of an extended stay at the Grafenhof sanitarium. But, as he later told an interviewer, "When the body is ill the brain develops astonishingly well." While he was in the hospital, his grandfather died, leaving him his typewriter. Requesting books from his grandfather's shelves, Bernhard began, for the first time, to read literature: Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoyevsky. He also began systematically working through his memories of childhood, "gathering evidence" about his own past and making notes on innumerable slips of paper. "I had now discovered my method of working," he wrote, "my own brand of infamy, my particular form of brutality, my own idiosyncratic taste."

During his stay at Grafenhof, Bernhard published his first short story, an homage to his grandfather. After his departure (against doctor's orders), he worked as a cultural journalist and court reporter with a Salzburg newspaper, and then studied acting at Salzburg's Akademie Mozarteum. He published his first volume of poetry, "Auf der Erde und in der Hölle" ("On Earth and in Hell"), in 1957, and two others quickly followed. Critics have tended to regard Bernhard's poetry as a curiosity, and at first glance it appears to have little in common with his later work. The cycle of poems "In Hora Mortis" (Latin for "In the Hour of Death"), in which the poet plangently complains of his sorrow to a silent God, seems particularly incongruous. But seeds of his obsessions have started to sprout; the poems in "Under the Iron of the Moon" draw a dismal landscape of decay, in which flowers "blossom in blood" and "fears blow / in the wind." Bernhard was also refining a painstakingly precise approach to composition: Ingrid Bülau, a friend from his days at the Mozarteum, remembered hearing him recite his poems into a tape recorder, erasing and rerecording himself until he had got the tone and the rhythm exactly the way he wanted.

Bernhard's start as a novelist seems almost to have been an accident. His fourth book of poetry, titled "Frost," was rejected by his publisher. In response, Bernhard went into retreat and emerged, seven weeks later, with the draft of his first novel, also called "Frost." It consists of notes made by an unnamed medical apprentice who is sent on an atypical mission: he must observe the elderly painter Strauch and report on the man's condition, all the while keeping his own identity and purpose secret. Strauch, an eccentric misanthrope, has been living in an inn in the mountains, where the student also takes up residence; he quickly ingratiates himself with the old man, joining him on his long daily tramps.

It is unclear what purpose the student's observations serve; his letters back to the clinic are never answered. But the very act of logging the minutiae of a person's habits and language echoes the efforts of the young Bernhard in his mental note-taking in the sanitarium. In essence, the apprentice is learning how to be a writer. At first, he sticks to facts, noting how Strauch "spits out his sentences the way old people spray saliva into the air" and faithfully recording the painter's vaguely philosophical circumlocutions, while admitting that he does not understand them. But as the apprentice investigates his subject's deeply pessimistic state—Strauch has destroyed all his paintings, which are "a perpetual reminder of my worthlessness," and is fixated on suicide—he comes to "feel the contagion of his logically galloping illness." It is impossible for him to re-create the painter's persona through his language without somehow also taking on his identity.



Strauch quotes Pascal: "Our nature is motion, complete stasis is death." The novel's metaphor for this stasis is the gradually encroaching "iron frost" that will finally cover everything. The book's landscape is shot through with traces of pain; like the decaying bodies that the young Bernhard could still smell beneath the rebuilt streets of Salzburg, "grisly traces" of the war in the valley remain, occasionally shocking their way through the snow. Strauch describes the landscape as "ugly and menacing and full of wicked memory particles, a landscape that can really dismember a man." By the end, the painter has disappeared into the snow, both literally and figuratively: he goes missing, and the search for him must be called off because of a heavy snowfall. We must assume that it is suicide. "The cold is eating into the center of my brain," he tells the apprentice.

Like Kafka, one of the writers he most admired, Bernhard composed nearly all his fiction from a single template, a template already evident in "Frost." His typical protagonist—often loosely based on a real-life model, such as Glenn Gould or Ludwig Wittgenstein—is a genius who is obsessed with an impossible project and is eventually destroyed by the tension between the desire for perfection in his work and the knowledge that it is unattainable. In "Correction" (1975), the scientist Roithamer spends years building a structure in the shape of a geometrically perfect cone, only to commit suicide after the project's completion. Rudolf, in "Concrete" (1982), has been working for years on a book about Mendelssohn without writing a word of it.

Such obsessive themes demand an obsessive form. In his struggle to depict consciousness in action, Bernhard honed an exquisite union of structure and idea. His novels take the shape of extended monologues, which can continue for as long as a hundred pages without a paragraph break, and which hurtle through every emotion from the pensive to the hysterical. Bernhard's early training as an opera singer finds expression in the musicality of his prose, which creates, holds, and repeats key phrases and ideas as a composer might do with a melodic motif. Since there is no narrative or exposition, it is up to the reader to deduce the action. One entire book consists of a man's thoughts as he sits in a chair at a party; in another, a man spends nearly a hundred pages contemplating a photograph. The purpose, as the narrator of "Correction" explains it, is to penetrate the subject's mental state:

> When I concern myself with Roithamer, with what order of magnitude am I dealing? I ask myself, clearly I am dealing with a head that is willing and compelled to go to extremes in everything he does and capable, in this reciprocity of intellectual interaction, of peak record performances, a man who takes his own development, the development of his character and of his inborn intellectual gifts to its utmost peak, its utmost limits, its highest degree of realization . . . and who must force everything he is, in the final analysis, to coalesce in one extreme point, force it all to the utmost limits of his intellectual capacity and his nervous tension until, at the highest degree of such expansion and contraction and the total concentration he has repeatedly achieved, he must actually be torn apart.

Unsurprisingly, this style, with seemingly interminable sentences wending from subject to subject without pause for breath, has its detractors. Even David McLintock, in an essay on the difficulty of translating Bernhard, calls him "a curiously unpromising writer." But this stylistic obduracy was, for Bernhard, both a necessity and a source of glee. Bernhard has been called an *Übertreibungskunstler*, an artist of exaggeration. Not only do his novels, pushing every idea to its extreme, require a similarly extreme form; he also

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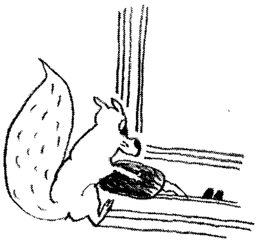
took pleasure in prose that is hyperbolic, over the top, even joyful in its own insanity. When he is in the mood, he can be very funny: his musings on the problems of the artist are serious, but he surrounds them with often hilarious digressions on everything from hand-knitted sweaters ("hideous knitwear") to his theory that three-ring binders, and the bureaucracy they symbolize, are the downfall of German literature ("The one exception is of course Kafka, who actually *was* a bureaucrat"). The eternal troublemaker who once referred to his writing as his "particular form of brutality" might also have taken some delight in watching his readers squirm. He told of leaving one of his own plays early and getting his coat from the checkroom attendant, who said sympathetically, "You don't like it, either, do you?"

There is a deeper purpose to Bernhard's apparent linguistic sadism. He seems to have taken Wittgenstein's well-known dictum "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" as a personal challenge. Accordingly, he tried to expand the outer limit of his own language to the point where it could encompass even the most extreme forms of human experience. "In Hora Mortis" ends with a poem that appears to depict the moment of death, unravelling into a string of barely articulated cries: "my thorn sticks / piercing / oh / piercing / oh / piercing / oh / oh / oh / my / Oh." In the novella "Amras," Bernhard tried assembling fragments of notes and diary entries to depict a family's pathology. In novels such as "Gargoyles" and "The Lime Works," he began to develop his idiosyncratic use of long paragraphs and monologues, finding in their looping form a way of writing about the secrets hidden in the Austrian past and the problems faced by those who inherit them.



"Correction" marked the apotheosis of this style and is perhaps Bernhard's masterpiece. The novel's first section consists of a hundred-plus-page monologue by an unnamed friend of the scientist Roithamer, who has come to sort out Roithamer's papers after his suicide: thousands of slips of paper and a "bulky manuscript" titled "About Altensam and everything connected with Altensam, with special attention to the Cone." Altensam is Roithamer's family estate, which the scientist inherited, to his chagrin, after his parents died in a car accident. The Cone turns out to be an "edifice as a work of art" that Roithamer spent the last six years of his life perfecting, intending it to be a gift for his beloved sister: he designed it to exact mathematical specifications and had it constructed in a clearing at the absolute center of the Kobernausser forest. "The idea was to make my sister perfectly happy by means of a construction perfectly adapted to her person," Roithamer explains in the papers that he left behind. But his sister was so horrified by the Cone that she became sick and died just months after seeing it. On the way to her funeral, Roithamer attacks his manuscript, "correcting it over and over again," and says that he will burn the essay after he has "destroyed it by totally correcting it into the exact opposite of what he had started out to say." He hangs himself shortly afterward.

Roithamer's friend, overwhelmed by this literary archive, decides to "sort and sift" the papers but not to alter them. The second half of the book, another paragraph of more than a hundred pages, represents a narrative of sorts, entirely in Roithamer's words (indicated awkwardly in translation by the interjection "so Roithamer," meaning "according to Roithamer"), pieced together from his fragments. The notes record Roithamer's hatred for his family, primarily for his mother, who locked him as a child in a turret room filled with dead flies. And they describe with pride the process of building the Cone, the thrill of undertaking something that has never been done before, and the despondency that leads him to "correct" what he has done: "We're constantly correcting, and correcting ourselves, most rigorously, because we recognize at every moment that we did it all wrong (wrote it, thought it, made it all wrong) . . . that everything to this point in time is a falsification, so we correct this falsification, and then we again correct the correction of this falsification and we correct the result of the correction of a correction andsoforth." But the "*ultimate correction*," he realizes, is suicide. In the book's virtuosic final passage, Roithamer's mind unspools toward its breaking point:

> Correction of the correction of the correction of the correction. . . . We can't always exist at the highest pitch of intensity, so we start to slow down in our thinking and doing (feeling), so that after a while we can go back to thinking, doing, feeling with even greater intensity, and in this way we can eventually reach ever greater degrees of intensity; as long as we haven't crossed the border, the extreme limits, we're not crazy. . . . We always went too far, so Roithamer, so we were always pushing toward the extreme limit. But we never thrust ourselves beyond it. Once I have thrust myself beyond it, it's all over, so Roithamer, "all" underlined. We're always set toward that predetermined moment, "predetermined moment" underlined. When that moment has come, we don't know that it has come, but it is the right moment. We can exist at the highest degree of intensity as long as we live, so Roithamer (June 7). The end is no process. Clearing.

This vision of death as the "ultimate correction" must be understood as one of Bernhard's famous exaggerations: if the artist could achieve greatness only by surrendering his entire person, then Bernhard himself—who, after all, continued to write and publish steadily up to the end of his life—could not attain it. Even Bernhard recognized the "monstrousness," as Roithamer says, of living such a life. It is the ultimate bleak joke.

In the plays and novels that Bernhard published during his last decade, culminating in "Heldenplatz," he addressed himself ever more ferociously to disrupting the silence surrounding Austria's Nazi past. His final novel, "Extinction" (1986), dramatizes most vividly what he termed *Herkunftskomplex*, or "descent complex": how does one deal with an unwanted inheritance? Franz-Josef Murau, the speaker in this novel—which, again, is divided into two hundred-plus-page monologues—has just received news that his parents and brother have been killed in a car accident, leaving Wolfsegg, the family home, in his hands. He feels nothing but resentment toward them and toward the estate, where they sheltered Nazis before and after the war in the children's playhouse. Even now, the former Gauleiters turn out in force for the funeral, a disgusting spectacle:

> The bishops . . . will be followed—with measured tread, as they say—by the Gauleiters, the S.S. officers, and the members of the Blood Order. And these will be followed by the National Socialist Catholic population, I thought. And the music will be played by our National Socialist Catholic band. The National Socialist salvos will be fired, and the National Socialist bells will toll. And if we're in luck our National Socialist sun will shine throughout the ceremony, and if we're out of luck we'll be drenched by the National Socialist rain.

Murau's rage reaches its peak when he remembers a former friend of the family, a miner named Schermaier, who was informed on during the war, for listening to Swiss radio, and was sent to a concentration camp. Afterward, he received a token sum in reparation, while a former Nazi nearby receives a generous pension. "What kind of a state is it," Murau asks himself, "that pays a fat pension to a mass murderer and showers him with honors and commendations, yet no longer troubles about Schermaier?" In his anger, he decides to write a book to be called "Extinction," whose purpose will be "to extinguish what it describes, to extinguish everything that Wolfsegg means to me, everything that Wolfsegg is, everything." But he realizes that Wolfsegg, contaminated by its past, must be extinguished literally as well. On the novel's last page, he reveals his decision to hand over the estate to the Jewish community in Vienna. There is something ridiculous in the gesture: an act of charity alone cannot redeem Austria's pathology. But Murau has no other choice; he has reached the logical end of his arguments. Just as Roithamer must "correct" his manuscript out of existence, so must Murau extinguish Wolfsegg along with himself. Thus absolved of his responsibility, he soon dies.

"I won't have anything to do with this state, or no more than is absolutely necessary," Murau concludes toward the end of "Extinction." The words are strikingly similar to those with which Bernhard's will, only a few years later, attempted to ban his work from Austria. Whether Bernhard thought of himself as a Murau, disposing of his estate in as perverse a manner as possible, or as a Roithamer, destroying the eccentric edifice that was his life's work, the verbal echo must surely have brought him a mordant satisfaction. "What a good thing it is that we have always adopted an ironic view of everything, however seriously we have taken it," he mused in his memoirs. He kept it up to the end. ♦

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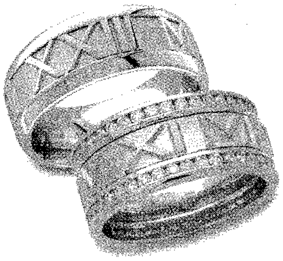

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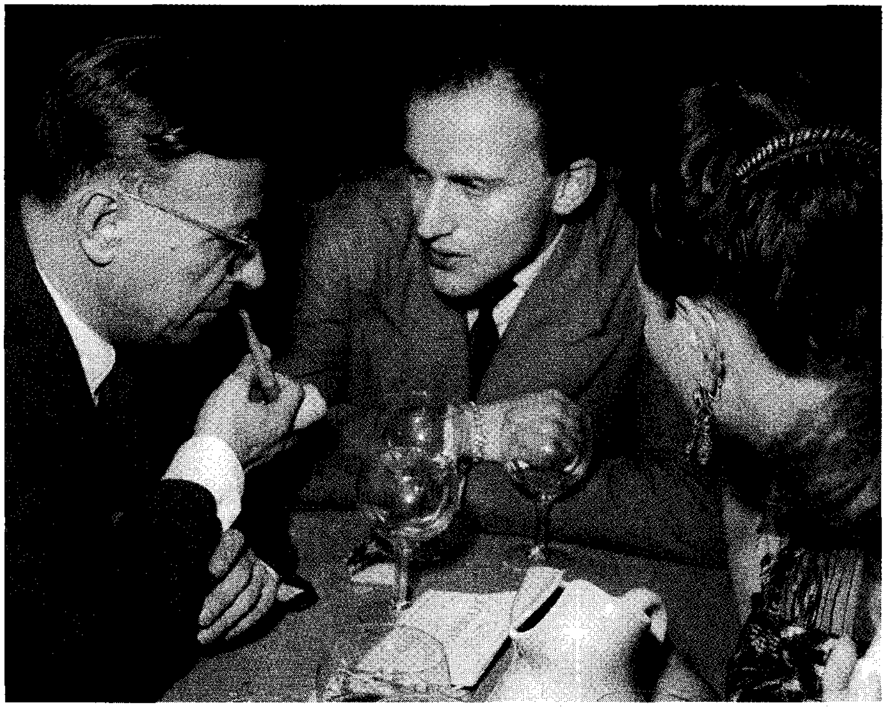
PRINCE OF SAINT-GERMAIN

How Boris Vian brought cool to Paris.

BY DAN HALPERN

In 1946, Boris Vian—novelist, poet, playwright, songwriter, jazz trumpeter, screenwriter, actor, and general scourge of anyone failing to have enough fun in Paris in the postwar era—came to New York. He made the trip from France by submarine, caused a small international incident upon arrival, and had lunch. Then he ventured forth to discover America.



Vian (center) with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

GEORGES DUDOGNON / COURTESY RIZZOLI

Vian was impressed by the state of American progress, which, he concluded, was far ahead of that of his native country, and not so impressed by American girls, whom he deemed silly things with large behinds. He ran into Hemingway but didn't recognize him, and failed to say hello. He went to see the Empire State Building, only to discover that it had recently been demolished. He came across the Surrealist André Breton living in Harlem camouflaged as a black man and calling himself Andy. He spent a morning sitting in front of his hotel, hoping to see a lynching, but was disappointed.

Or so he said in "Impressions of America," one of a series of columns written for Jean-Paul Sartre's literary review, *Les Temps Modernes*, under the general title "Chronicles of a Liar." In fact, Vian never visited the United States, except in his own imagination. But America was one of Vian's most enduring fascinations, born of a love of jazz and matured by the postwar Continental vogue for all things transatlantic. The sentiment, however, has never remotely been returned; his obscurity in this country is all but perfect. Now it seems that this may be changing. Tam-Tam Books, an enterprising publisher in Los Angeles, has embarked on translating a wide range of Vian's work, including the scandalous pseudonymous novel that launched his career. Dalkey Archive Press has published the first American edition of his last novel, "Heartsnatcher" ($13.95), and Rizzoli has recently published Vian's "The Manual of Saint-Germain-des-Prés" ($40), a facetious guidebook to bohemian Paris, left unpublished at his death, in 1959.

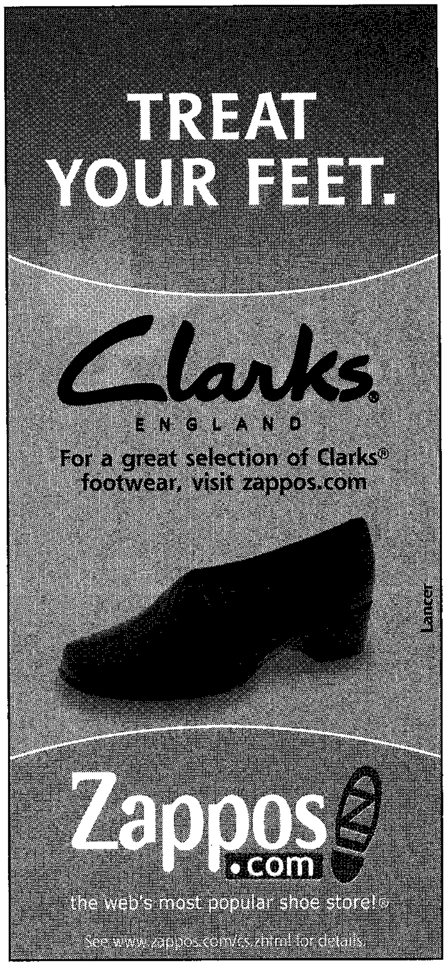
Vian's great novel, "L'Écume des Jours," written in 1946, has become one of the most popular books in all of twentieth-century French literature, making Vian, in France, the sort of hero whom succeeding generations transform into an institution. (The title translates, literally, as "Foam of the Days," or "Scum of the Days," though it has been rendered, in various translations, as "Froth on the Daydream," "Mood Indigo," and, most recently, "Foam of the Daze.") But while he was alive Vian was known less for his work than for being the epitome of Left Bank bohemia, standing at the center of its postwar rehabilitation after the trauma of the German Occupation. He was the presiding spirit of intellectual café society, and a close conspirator with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. He had no allegiance to existentialism, however. Instead, he offered a single absurd voice, dedicated to pleasure and provocation, to dreams and pure subjectivity. While Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty spent their time worrying about choosing the right sort of authentic freedom or struggling against world-historical forces, Vian was more interested in amusing himself. "I am not an existentialist," he wrote. "For an existentialist, existence precedes essence. For me, there isn't any such thing as essence."

"I was born, by chance, on March 10, 1920, at the door of a maternity ward, which was closed due to a strike," Vian wrote by way of autobiography. "My mother, pregnant by the works of Paul Claudel (whom, to this day, I cannot stand), was in her thirteenth month and could not wait for a legal settlement to the issue." In fact, he was born, on that day, into a well-to-do bourgeois family living in Ville-d'Avray, a suburb of Paris. The Vians lost most of their money in the crash of 1929, but by the time he was a teen-ager Boris was already committed to not letting anything get in the way of fun: he organized legendary parties in his family garden, with guests dancing into the night.

As a child, Vian was given a diagnosis of a heart problem, and he battled various ailments throughout childhood and adolescence. He often predicted that he would die before he was forty. An early death, and a long-foretold one, became an essential element of his personal mythology: he had no time to waste. He liked to say that one should be a specialist in everything, and he did his best to live up to this dictum.

In his late teens, Vian began listening to Duke Ellington and took up the trumpet. In 1941, his heart condition having kept him out of the war, he began performing with the clarinettist Claude Abadie's jazz band, which soon was renamed the Abadie-Vian Orchestra. Meanwhile, he did his best to avoid any sort of regular work, though he did spend four years as a civil engineer, employed in the glassworks division of the French standards bureau. (His first assignment there was to find the perfect bottle, appropriately enough: one of his more famous songs is called "I Drink," and runs, "I drink/the worst cheap wines./It's disgusting/but it passes the time.") After the war, he formed his own group, which he called the Little Choir of Saint-Germain of the Feet, and helped transform the underground club Le Tabou into one of the hottest spots in the city. As he wrote in "The Manual of Saint-Germain-des-Prés," "Rather quickly Le Tabou evolved into a center of organized madness."

When Vian was twenty-one, he married Michelle Léglise, the daughter of an inventor, and his first attempts at writing were done to amuse her. He began with poetry—a book of sonnets—and finished two novels before writing "Foam of the Days." He dedicated it to her—*"Pour mon bibi"*—and the book has the quality of an absurd love letter, a fairy tale for grownups. Colin, a young man possessed of a fortune large enough to avoid any sort of work, and Chick, a young man without fortune who avoids work nonetheless, meet two girls, Chloe and Alise. Colin has a factotum, Nicolas, a sort of Surrealist Jeeves, who serves pâté made out of eels that he finds in the plumbing, carries on conversations with mice, sleeps with teen-age girls, and is Alise's uncle. When Chick remarks on the resemblance between uncle and niece, noting a particular difference in the general area of the chest, Nicolas an-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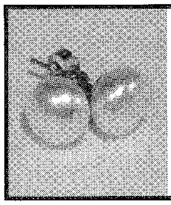
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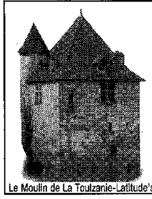
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swers that, indeed, "she is more developed perpendicularly, if I may be permitted this precision." Colin and Chloe fall in love, and marry.

But this simple tale is only the canvas onto which Vian's hyperactive imagination splashes a rich variety of bizarre effects and contemporary allusions. He misses no opportunity to invent new words, or to play with the ambiguities of already existing ones. The book is peppered with pianos that mix cocktails according to which notes are played, rifles that require being fed by human warmth to grow regularly, a philosopher named Jean-Sol Partre, who arrives at his lectures on the back of an elephant, and a visit from a noncommittal Jesus, who refuses to take responsibility for any of it. The book is half a satirical picture of sleek postwar culture—gadgets, car trips, parties—and half a blooming forest of surreal effusions. Here is Colin, off to meet his friends, seeing the world as only he sees it and drawing his own conclusions:

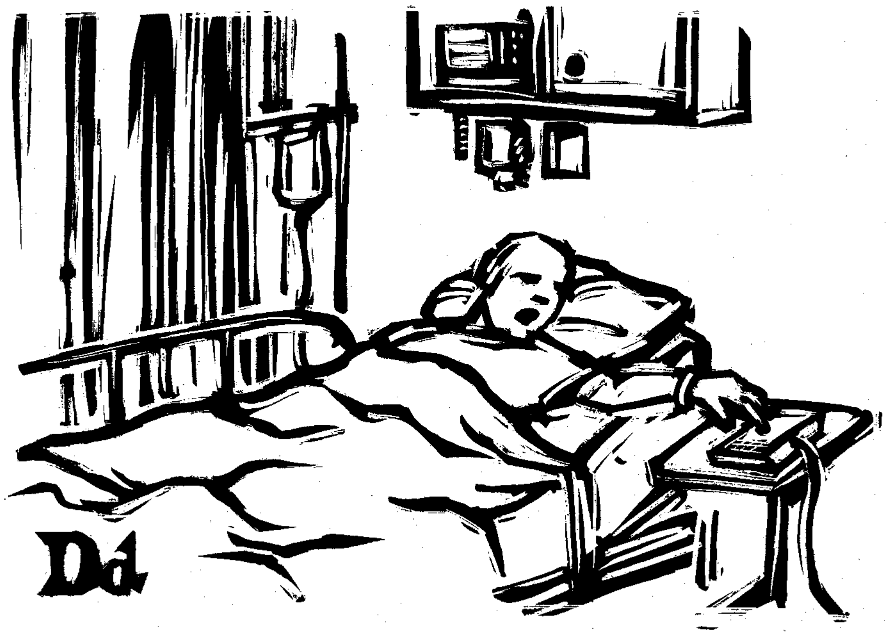
> Colin got out of the metro and went up the stairs. He came out on the wrong side and went round the station to orient himself. He took the direction of the wind with a yellow silk handkerchief and the color of the handkerchief, carried away by the wind, landed on a large and irregularly formed building, which then took on the air of the Molitor skating-rink-pool complex. . . . A man in a white sweater opened a changing room for him, accepted a tip for his work that he would use for his leisure because he looked like a liar, and abandoned him in this forgotten dungeon after haphazardly scrawling his initials on a blackened rectangle placed for that purpose inside the cabin. Colin noticed that the man did not have the head of a man, but of a pigeon, and did not understand why he was put to work at the skating rink rather than at the pool.

That a pigeon-headed man is better suited to water than to ice is hardly something that most readers will feel requires no explanation, but Vian isn't interested in explaining what he sees. He deploys his effects with deadpan bravado, as if they were nothing out of the ordinary. He works in a universe of pure lightness, rising up against what Italo Calvino once called "the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world," lifting himself above all laws of gravity out of a certainty that they do not apply to him.

Until, suddenly, they do. For most of the book, Colin and Chick live in a childish world, of girls and jazz and fun, but around them Vian's surreal sketchbook starts to display an almost giddy cruelty. Vian evokes a mechanized world in which human lives, apart from those of the main characters, seem utterly expendable. At Partre's lecture, his fans are so crazy to see him that some try to parachute in (a team of firefighters drown them with hoses) and others try to enter the hall through the sewers (security stomps them, and rats eat the survivors).

"Foam of the Days" is a deeply silly piece of work, but, as these macabre flourishes accumulate, it becomes, ultimately, a tragedy, following a descent into despair that is characteristic of Vian's novels. Soon after her wedding, Chloe falls sick. A water lily is found growing in her lung, and her illness destroys Colin's world, forcing him into the domain of money and misery and heaviness. Vian's delight in youth and his sense of its fragility are always intertwined: it is the responsible lives of adults that are nonsensical, and a refusal to grow up that is the only reasonable way to live, but this natural course of things is not allowed. Like Vian, Colin wants nothing more than to play lovely games his whole life, but life will not let him.

"Foam of the Days" was the third novel that Vian wrote, but commercial success eluded him. In the summer of 1946, however, he made a wager with the head of a struggling publishing house that, given a few weeks, he could produce a best-seller. He sequestered himself for the next fifteen days, emerging to announce that he had discovered and translated a novel by an African-American writer named Vernon Sullivan, who had found no American publisher willing to touch it. The book, titled "I Spit on Your Graves," is a pulpy, grotesque cartoon with a deliberately incendiary plot: a black man, passing for white, murders a pair of wealthy white girls he has seduced after his brother is lynched. Published in French toward the end of 1946, the book initially attracted only minimal notice, until a man named Daniel Parker, the leader of a right-wing morality watchdog group, Cartel d'Action Sociale et Morale, set out to have the book banned and its author, translator, and publisher prose-



"Come quickly—I think I had an out-of-pocket experience."

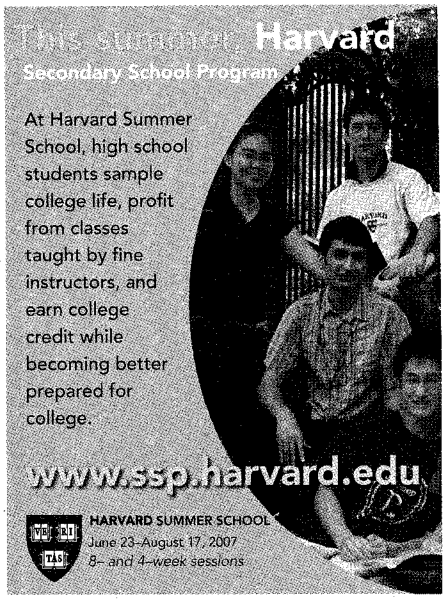
cuted. The book's notoriety increased further when a deranged man strangled his lover in a hotel room, and the police found a copy of the book by the bed. Passages in which the protagonist strangles a woman had been circled.

Riding on this tide of scandal, "I Spit on Your Graves" became the best-selling book in France in 1947. Amid the uproar, Vian maintained that he was merely the translator—he even published a text of the putative English original—but by the end of 1948 he had to admit that there was no Sullivan, and that he was the book's sole author; he was eventually fined a hundred thousand francs for his offense to public morals. By then, a new Sullivan novel had appeared, "The Dead All Have the Same Skin," the story of a white man so repulsed by the fear that he is black that he turns to murder and rape. Vian named him Dan Parker.

The Sullivan novels catapulted Vian to a sudden professional success, but, as he himself acknowledged, they are not very good. They are avowedly trashy, presumably influenced by Vian's reading of American noir—an influence perhaps comparable to the effect of Hollywood B movies on French postwar cinema. Nonetheless, James Baldwin, in his long essay "The Devil Finds Work," thought "I Spit on Your Graves" worth taking seriously: "What informs Vian's book . . . is not sexual fantasy, but rage and pain: that rage and pain which Vian (almost alone) was able to hear in the black American musicians, in the bars, dives, and cellars, of the Paris of those years. . . . Vian would have known something of this from Faulkner, and from Richard Wright, and from Chester Himes, but he *heard* it in the music, and, indeed, he saw it in the streets." Baldwin also observed that the book's "vogue was due partly to the fact that it was presented as Vian's translation of an American novel. But this vogue was due also to Vian himself, who was one of the most striking figures of a long-ago Saint-Germain des Prés."

Indeed, from the end of the war, Vian was everywhere you looked—"the Prince of a subterranean kingdom," his biographer Noël Arnaud called him, "a prince in shirtsleeves with a trumpet for his scepter." "The Manual of Saint-Germain-des-Prés" portrays a scene filled with poets and painters, movie stars, singers, and philosophers—Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet, Alberto Giacometti, Tristan Tzara, Juliette Gréco, Simone Signoret. De Beauvoir, describing a party at the Vians', recalled:

> When I arrived, everyone had already drunk too much; his wife, Michelle, her long white silk hair falling on her shoulders, was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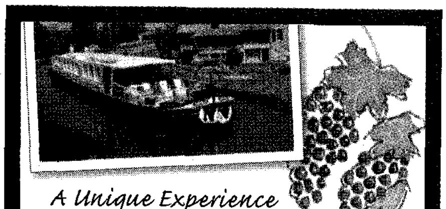

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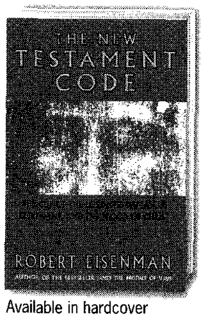

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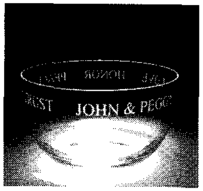

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> smiling to the angels; Astruc . . . was sleeping on the sofa, shoeless; I also drank valiantly while listening to records imported from America. Around two in the morning Boris offered me a cup of coffee; we sat in the kitchen and until dawn we talked: about his novel, on jazz, on literature, about his profession as an engineer. I found no affectation in his long, white and smooth face, only an extreme gentleness and a kind of stubborn candor. . . . We spoke, and dawn arrived only too quickly. I had the highest appreciation, when I had the chance of enjoying them, for these fleeting moments of eternal friendship.

American culture, discouraged in France by the Vichy regime, held enormous attraction for the postwar generation, and arguably helped France reshape its sense of self after the shame of the Occupation. Vian was at the center of this movement. He wrote a vast amount of jazz criticism, most of it for a journal called *Jazz Hot*, a publication that was, to the music of the time, something like what *Cahiers du Cinéma* was, later, to film. He became a leading promoter of American jazz in France, helping organize Paris gigs for Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis, and taking visiting musicians to parties, restaurants, and clubs.

He also wrote three more novels as Sullivan and three under his own name, but nothing sold as well as "I Spit on Your Graves," and, with each failure, Vian's finances became shakier. His marriage ended, and so did the novels; his entire corpus of fiction was produced in an extraordinary burst of activity between 1946 and 1953. He kept himself busy, however, turning his attention to music, journalism, the theatre, and translations. His collected works, published recently in France, run to fifteen large volumes—six novels under his own name and four under the Sullivan pseudonym, as well as a torrent of plays, poems, short stories, film scripts, opera librettos, cabaret shows, essays, criticism, treatises, pornography, and hundreds of songs. He published writings under twenty-seven different pseudonyms, and translated a great deal of American fiction, including works by Richard Wright, Raymond Chandler, and Ray Bradbury.

Even as his health declined, through the nineteen-fifties, he showed a willingness, indeed a compulsion, to turn his talents to anything. He recorded many of his own songs, and, in 1954, his music restored him to notoriety, when "The Deserter"—an antiwar song written just before France's defeat in Indochina and on the brink of the French-Algerian war—was banned. He also acted in six movies, most notably in Roger Vadim's film version of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses." He rounded out his career as a jazz A. & R. man, first for Philips and then for his friend the record producer Eddie Barclay.

Vian remains difficult to categorize, in part because he both was and wasn't a creature of his time. For all his cultural centrality in postwar Paris, his books have much less in common with anything his contemporaries were up to than with the linguistic playfulness of writers who preceded him, from Mallarmé to the Surrealists, or, for that matter, with literature that came just after—the practitioners of the *nouveau roman* who emerged in the late fifties, or the game-playing Oulipo crowd of the sixties. "He lived *ahead*," Arnaud wrote. "He was, and remains, on the arc of the future." "Foam of the Days" was largely ignored on its publication, but it became a totemic book to the revolutionary generation of 1968: by 1962, it had sold only three thousand copies; by 1975, the figure had reached a million.

But by then Vian was long dead. In 1959, as he sat in a movie theatre, watching an adaptation of "I Spit on Your Graves"—a French production that he had wanted nothing to do with and had tried to prevent from being made—his weak heart finally gave out. He was thirty-nine. According to Vian legend, he was able to bear only ten minutes of the movie before collapsing, and his last words were "These guys are supposed to be American? My ass!" Evidently, the Americans in the film were not the Americans Vian had seen in his head, and, for Vian, what he saw in his head was all that counted. In the preface to "Foam of the Days" he wrote, "There are only two things: love in all its forms with pretty girls and the music of New Orleans or Duke Ellington, it's the same. The rest should disappear, for the rest is ugly, and the brief demonstration that follows gathers all its energy from the fact that the story is entirely true, because I imagined it from one end to the other." ♦

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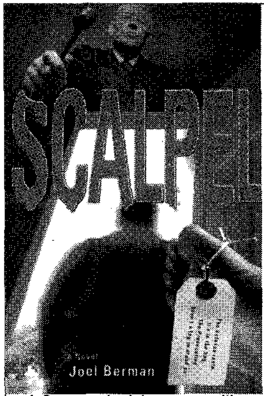
BRIEFLY NOTED

Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name, *by Vendela Vida (Ecco; $23.95).* In this slim, dour novel, a twenty-eight-year-old editor of film subtitles discovers on her father's death that he is not her biological parent: her mother, who abandoned her as a teen-ager, had been married to another man. Feeling betrayed by her fiancé, who has known about the deception for years, she abruptly leaves him to search for her real father in the northern reaches of Finland. Vida gives the icy landscape an eerie, forbidding beauty, and her writing has moments of great emotional acuity. Her heroine is inexplicable and often unlikable, but Vida skillfully draws a parallel between her harsh and thoughtless behavior and that of her mother. Unfortunately, this makes the ending, which intimates that one's problems may be easily shed, along with one's past, seem both hurried and unearned.

Julius Winsome, *by Gerard Donovan (Overlook; $23.95).* The title character of this unsettling novel lives alone in the deep woods of Maine, home to men "who cannot live anywhere else." Fifty-one and never married, Julius remains in the remote cabin where he grew up, with only the company of his dog, Hobbes, and thousands of books left him by his father. When Hobbes is shot at close range by a deer hunter, inchoate rage drives Julius out of his isolation to track down the killer. In past novels, Donovan has resorted to literary effects to make points about man's capacity for violence; here he settles for the clean punch of language, which he delivers with devastating force. In prose laced with hard-edged Shakespeareanisms—"amort," "blood-boltered," "cullion"—he pursues the nature of human cruelty, the reason that "some men must create pain in others to feel less of it themselves."

Copperheads, *by Jennifer L. Weber (Oxford; $28).* The threat posed by the Northerners known (first derogatively, then proudly) as the Copperheads, or Peace Democrats, has been underplayed by historians, but, as Weber writes in this nuanced history, by 1864 it was almost enough to bring Lincoln down. Horatio Seymour, a Copperhead who had called the Emancipation Proclamation "a proposal for the butchery of women and children, for scenes of lust and rapine," won the governorship of New York. The Copperheads, touting their allegiance to the Constitution but driven by racism, eventually alienated the Army and the public with their delusional belief in the Confederacy's willingness to compromise. There was also an obvious irony in their opposition both to the draft and to black enlistment in the Union Army. "You say you will not fight to free negroes," Lincoln wrote in a speech aimed at the Copperheads. "Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but, no matter."

The Girl with the Gallery, *by Lindsay Pollock (PublicAffairs; $30).* The art dealer Edith Gregor Halpert liked to say she was a little girl from Odessa who got her start as an entrepreneur selling penny candy. Fleeing immigrant life in Harlem, Halpert sought refuge in art classes and in the bohemian world south of Fourteenth Street. In 1926, after it became clear that she was better at spotting good art than at making it, she opened a gallery. The Downtown Gallery soon emerged as an influential dealer, stocking the collections of wealthy patrons with works by American artists like Stuart Davis and Max Weber. Pollock's amply researched account hesitates to go deeper than an animated recitation of Halpert's inventive business tactics, but it successfully conveys the boldness of a woman who aggressively championed her artists, buoying them through personal crises and the Depression, and helping them win the respect of the Eurocentric New York art world.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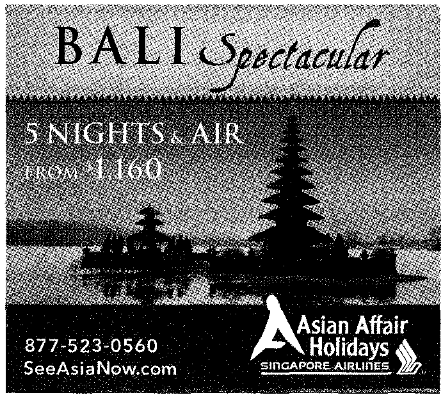
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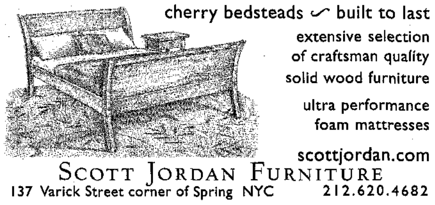
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CITY LIGHTS

Pina Bausch returns to BAM.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Pina Bausch, the queen of European dance theatre, is a master of the excruciated-artist interview. One journalist, Valerie Lawson, of the Sydney *Morning Herald*, reported that Bausch never answers a direct question about her work. All you can hope for is that, as she chain-smokes her Camels, she will, like the Sibyl, utter some dark clue about her art or, failing that, say what anguish it puts her through. "It's so terrible, horrible, you go down, down, down," she told Lawson. "It all takes so much strength. I'm so fragile. It's emotional." She doesn't know how long she can go on.

Such remarks must be taken in context (most artists go through hell—some are more likely to tell the press about it), but Bausch, now sixty-six, really may be getting tired. Because she has not brought her company, the Wuppertal Dance Theatre, to New York every year—and because, when she did come, she sometimes presented works that were nine or ten years old, and not in chronological order—it has been hard to track her progress, but the fact is that when she started performing here, in the mid-nineteen-eighties, she got a reputation, for theatre of cruelty, that she was already outgrowing. The pieces she showed in those early seasons were indeed cruel—they had gang rape, slashings, police dogs—but most of them were from the seventies. By the time we got to see them, Bausch was becoming something else: calmer, funnier, and also, as her obsession with cruelty subsided, rather at loose ends. In 1986, only two years after her first New York season, she started producing her "city" works. By then, she was an international star, and various great cities, one after another—Rome, Palermo, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Lisbon, Budapest, São Paulo—commissioned her to make evening-length shows about them. The company would spend about a month in the locale; the dancers would tell Bausch their impressions of the place, feed her ideas; she, combining these ideas with other material, would make the piece; and it would première, with great hoopla, in the city in question. Then it would tour, and that, in the usual case, was her output for the year. To me, this method signifies weariness: Bausch needed something external to give her a "hook," get her going. In fact, she rarely took the target city very seriously. You would never have known that "Palermo, Palermo" was about Palermo, or that the other pieces were about the other places, if the title or the musical choices—sometimes just the advertising—hadn't tipped you off.

Nevertheless, these municipal commissions were useful, in that they allowed Bausch to continue, and explore what remained, after the great wave of Weltschmerz that had floated her early work broke on the beach. We like Shakespeare not just for "King Lear" but also for "The Tempest." The early idea may be the most striking, but sometimes it is in the later work, where the tension is relaxed, that the artist really sticks her fingers into the void. So it is with "Nefés," which was first shown in, and in honor of, Istanbul (*nefés* is Turkish for "breath") in 2003 and had its American première at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this month.

Like most of Bausch's pieces, it is a collection of skits. A woman enters, carrying a vase of flowers. She removes the flowers, drinks water from the vase, plunks the flowers back in, and exits. At another juncture, this same woman—Nazareth Panadero, a company veteran—comes out and tells us, quite firmly, that all her good qualities were inherited from her grandmother. She

Bausch in Wuppertal, Germany, in 1983. Photograph by Helmut Newton.

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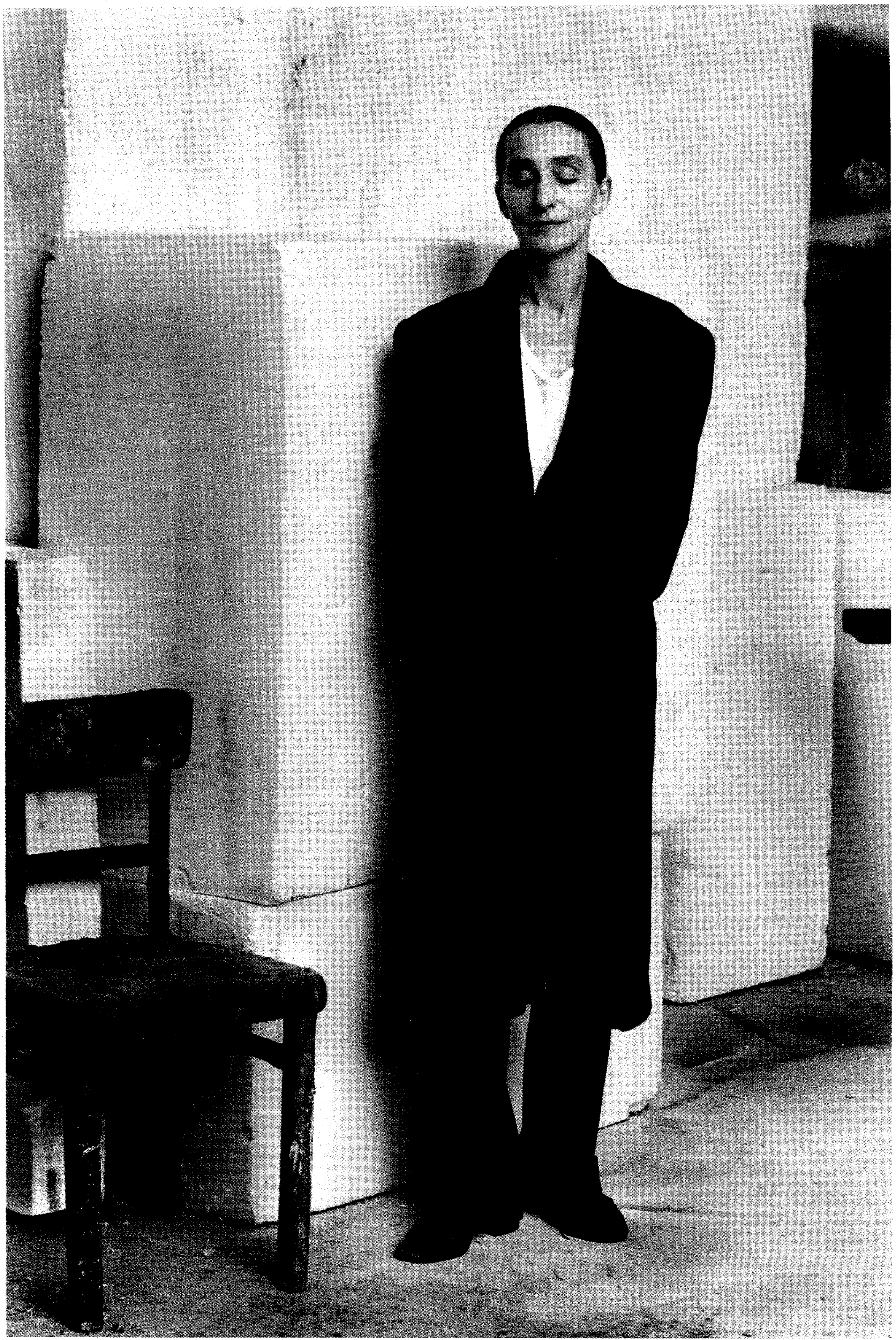

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then produces a black garter belt and puts it on over her dress, saying, "It's beautiful, isn't it? It's a pity to hide it, don't you think?" That settled, another woman appears, at the side of the stage, and, one by one, ten people crawl out from under her long gown. She counts them off into a microphone: "One, two, three . . ." When they have all emerged, Panadero says, "My grandmother had ten children." Everyone giggles and goes away.

These absurdist skits were once the vehicle for Bausch's exceedingly sinister portrayal of the war between the sexes. If "Nefés" had been made twenty years ago, something more would have gone on under that dress, and the garter belt would have been pinned on a man, not a woman. Actually, "Nefés" did have one old-style scene of humiliation. (A man and a woman are having a picnic by a lake. The man gallantly pours the woman a drink and lights her cigarette. She reclines on the floor, whereupon the man empties a bottle of water onto her face. She ignores this. She sips her drink, smokes her cigarette. He then pours another bottle of water on her face. And so on, maybe four times.) But that was the only resurgence of flat-out theatre of cruelty. Now the subject of Bausch's skits is mostly discomfort. What was it like for Panadero to drink the water in which those asters had been rotting? How was it for the other woman to have ten big people lift her dress and crawl between her legs? How was it for them? Was it hot under there? In her early pieces, too, Bausch dealt in discomfort, but it tended to get upstaged by the sadism. Now this milder oppression is the subject, and it is more penetrating simply because it is milder, and therefore more recognizable. Someone standing too close to you, someone blowing his breath in your face: for many of us, that's the hell of social life.

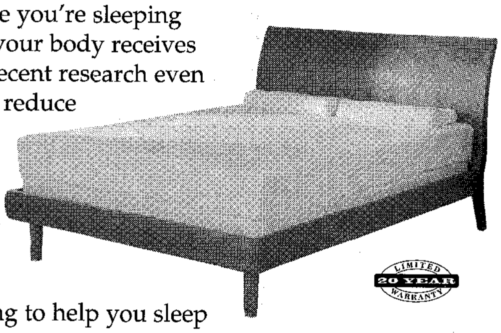
Bausch has pulled back not just on aggressive behavior but on aggressive décor. Her earlier pieces, famously, seemed to take place in a peat bog or an egg sac or something. In one, the stage was flooded with ankle-deep water; in another, it was heaped with dried leaves; in another, it was bounded with massive cliffs of dirt. But in "Nefés" the only "set" (by Peter Pabst) is a rain of water that comes down from the flies early on and forms a big pool. Bausch doesn't use this, as she used her former installations, to "primitivize" her drama. The pool is merely an adjunct of lyricism—it was the lake for the picnic—or of anxiety. To anyone still in touch with his inner kindergartner, a puddle on the floor is unsettling. Why doesn't somebody mop it up? we think. And what if the women step in it and get their dresses wet? They do so, and their soaked hems smack against their ankles.

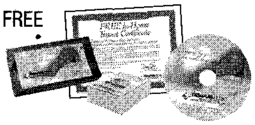
But for the most part that's the extent of the pain, this subdermal unease. What we see in the majority of the skits is an exploration of the facts of the moving body: weight, leverage, direction. "Nefés" opens with an episode in a Turkish bath, which, apart from the score (a suite of mostly Turkish music), is the show's only direct reference to Istanbul. The masseurs beat the hell out of their clients. But then the company's women come onstage, dressed, as usual in Bausch's work, in thirties-style evening gowns. Each woman drops her hair over her face, stands over a recumbent man, and pats her hair again and again. There is no real-life, skit-friendly explanation for this. Why would a woman bend over the body of a man and pat her hair? The juxtaposition of textures, of the silky, flowing hair with the heavy, sweaty bodies, says something. We think of the blessed damozel leaning down from Heaven. But we don't stop thinking that the scene is also pretty bizarre, and that double meaning is echt Bausch.

Many of the skits are more enigmatic. At one point, a tiny woman, Ditta Miranda Jasjfi, is lifted by a man and carried backward as she is trying to walk forward—a sort of up-the-down-escalator maneuver. Then another man grabs her and moves her forward; then the first moves her backward once more. All the while, her feet are stepping forward in the air. Again, we don't know quite what to make of this. Jasjfi is being manipulated, moved against her will, but she looks perfectly happy, as do the other women whom, throughout the show, the men lay hands on and press their bodies against and twirl like lariats. All you can say is that the scene is not the assault and battery that once dominated Bausch's stage. It looks more like the human condition: someone trying to move forward, something pulling her back.

Bausch found her "skit" form, which involved very little dance, at the end of the nineteen-seventies. Before that, however, she was a regular modern-dance choreographer, and lately she has returned to dance. The skits in "Nefés" are interleaved with pure-dance solos; everyone in the twenty-member company got one. In part, this is a sign of the age of Bausch's troupe. She has directed the Wuppertal Dance Theatre for thirty-three years, and many of the veteran performers have retired. She now has younger people—more technically accomplished, as is the trend these days—and she can get some impressive moves out of them. The resurgence of dance may, in addition, be a sign of Bausch's professed exhaustion, in that it allows her company to help her make the piece. Many of the solos looked improvised. One of them, an Indian-style number performed by Shantala Shivalingappa, was sensational. (When she finished it, another dancer came onstage and asked her to repeat it, which she did, and I think everyone was grateful.) But, for the most part, the solos were like the white bread in a club sandwich. They were fine, and held the show together, but they were a little boring.

The power of "Nefés" lay where it always lies in Bausch, in the skits, but their new ambiguity, their freedom from the note of complaint that marked her earlier work, made them especially piercing. Near the end, Bausch lined up all ten of her women onstage, in their lustrous gowns—one gold, one peach-colored, one sky blue—and had the line sweep around three hundred and sixty degrees, in a square of dappled light that rotated while they did. People use the word "dreamlike," but this sight really was like a dream, in that it was eerie and disturbing at the same time that it was beautiful. It conformed to the actual processes of the mind, prior to the imposition of logic. There was the image: a flash of meaning, then darkness, just like what we see on the midnight hour. Such visionary gleams often turn up in artists' late work. So does ditheriness. At close to three hours, "Nefés" was long, and felt longer. It was worth it, though. ♦





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THE THEATRE

LOST IN PARADISE

Vamping and camping in Eden.

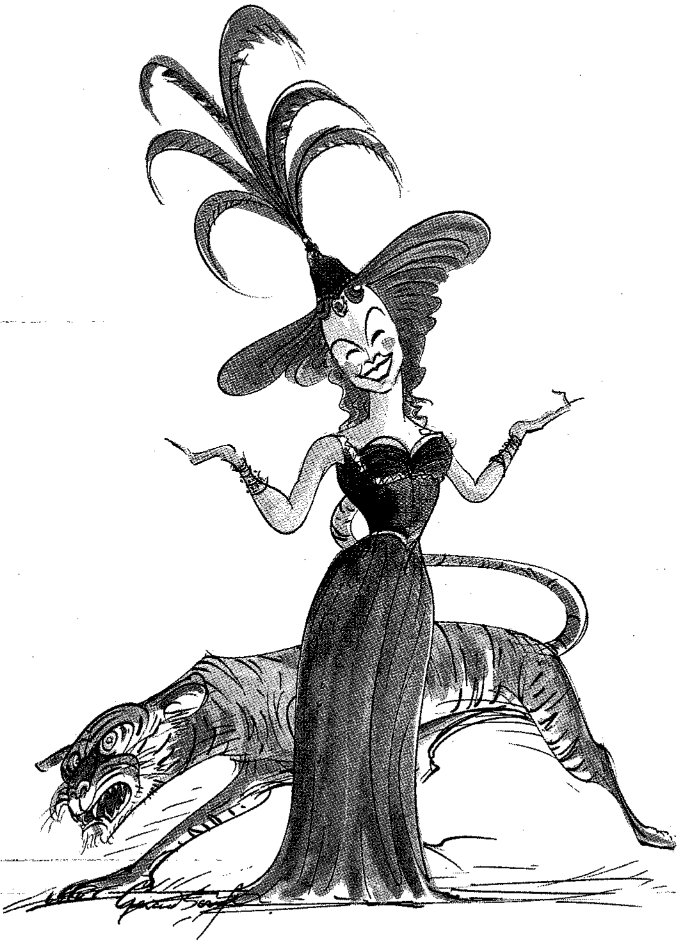
BY JOHN LAHR

Brethren, let us ponder Eden, at least what we know of it on Broadway. At its most whimsical—in, for instance, "The Begat," in Burton Lane and E. Y. Harburg's "Finian's Rainbow" (1947)—Eden was a sensational place, full of rousing wonder and wit, and, judging by its gospel sound, evidently integrated:

The Lord made Adam, the
  Lord made Eve,
He made 'em both a little bit
  naïve.
They lived as free as the Sum-
  mer breeze,
Without pajamas and without
  chemise.
Until they stumbled on the
  apple trees.
Then she looked at him, and
  he looked at her,
And they knew immedjetly
  what the world was fur.

For a long time, references to Eden weren't too common on Broadway, perhaps because the musical appropriated, instead, the notion of paradise on earth: abundant, joyous, unreflective, and radically innocent—a place where the concepts of sin and curiosity had no purchase. By the mid-sixties, however, the assassination of J.F.K. and a death toll in Vietnam that was far higher than that of the present Iraq misadventure had burst Broadway's bubble. Death was the new American abundance, and the musical, like Adam and Eve, was cast out of its sweet, perfected world into a land of woe.

Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's "The Apple Tree," which ran from 1966 to 1967, and has now been revived for the first time, by the Roundabout Theatre Company (at Studio 54, under the lacklustre direction of Gary Griffin), returns to the idea of Eden, with a triptych of stories about temptation. What's fascinating about the show, which was created by two of Broadway's master craftsmen at the height of their powers ("The Apple Tree" was a follow-up to the team's landmark 1964 show, "Fiddler on the Roof"), is the uncertainty of its tone and its attack. Psychologically speaking, Adam and Eve's expulsion is, as they say, a "fortunate fall": the beginning not of mankind's damnation but of its liberation; sexuality, after all, is the catalyst for growth. But how to grow? Where to start? How to deal with loss? Here, Bock and Harnick, despite their expertise, seem as bewildered in the new American wilderness as Adam and Eve. As if banished from the paradise of their imagination, they don't know quite what to sing about. In its storytelling, "The Apple Tree" is stymied: tentative in its humor and unadventurous in its attempt to probe its characters' emotional stakes. The silver apples that adorn the gnarly tree on the show's hemp curtain turn out to be an emblem of the evening—at once decorative and indigestible.



Kristin Chenoweth owns the franchise on 4-H Club buoyancy.

GERALD SCARFE

The first, and most satisfying, half of the musical is adapted from Mark Twain's "The Diary of Adam and Eve," whose tender melancholy fun brings out the best in all the collaborators. (The two other vignettes, by Frank R. Stockton and Jules Feiffer, respectively, are diva spoofs—one of queenly jealousy, the other of movie-queen rags to riches—and little more than theatrical vamping.) Twain's Adam (Brian d'Arcy James) is a stolid loner and a lunkhead. "I . . . do hereby name all you creatures flying around in the sky—flyers," he says, when commanded by God to name the earth's creatures. If naming is claiming, then Adam has nothing on Eve; when he first runs into her, the only word he can come up with is "numbskull." Eve, however, is undaunted; she is an optimistic, tenacious chatterbox who also happens to be a babe. She is, in other words, Kristin Chenoweth, who owns the Broadway franchise on this particular brand of 4-H Club buoyancy. The pert and pint-size actress is adorable, and she knows how to work her charm. "I seem to aggravate it," her Eve says of Adam, after first seeing him, adding, "I think it's a reptile. I never see it do anything. Nothing seems to interest it—except resting. It's a man!" Chenoweth's Eve has mastered the art of insinuation; she hides her aggression behind a fetching show of niceness. No sooner has she talked her way into Adam's hut than she's redecorating it. At one point, she bustles across the stage, dwarfed by a large pot of grass. "I know exactly where I'm going to put it," she says. Chenoweth has a big, well-trained operatic voice; she can clown with it, and she seduces as she stings. For "The Lady or the Tiger?," she does a Dolores Gray vixen imitation, complete with cracking bullwhip, and, for "Passionella," she sends up Marilyn Monroe as she hits her high C. But she is never better at teasing her own vanity than when she sings to her own reflection, in "Friends," "If/I should need sympathy,/You would never turn your/Back on me./I have you/Who needs two/Friends?"

Eve can't be sure of Adam's attention; this gives the Snake (the commanding Marc Kudisch) his opening. He expertly pitches knowledge as a form of power over Adam's heart, holding Eve in his arms as he sings, "With your nifty, newfound education/He'll relish every conversation." In Twain's story, Eve predeceases Adam. Before her death, she sings "What Makes Me Love Him," a love song that also plays as a hymn to *Homo sapiens*, showing off Harnick's subtlety and sweetness:

> What makes me love him?
> It's quite beyond me.
> It must be something
> I can't define;
> Unless it's merely that he's masculine,
> And that he's mine.

Adam is left to tend the flowers she named. "I used to think it was a terrible tragedy when Eve and I had to leave the garden," he says. "Now I know it really didn't matter. Because, wheresoever she was, there was Eden." Paradise, Adam has learned, is a heaven of the imagination—which was the message of Broadway musicals all along.

"Fanatics," John Keats wrote, "weave a paradise for a sect." The point is well made in Les Freres Corbusier's droll fifty-five-minute production "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant" (in revival at the Fourth Street Theatre; conceived and directed by Alex Timbers, with book, music, and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow). The show tells the story of the author, explorer, atomic physicist, nautical engineer, and horticulturist L. Ron Hubbard, the founding swami of Dianetics. (The "L" in Hubbard's name is a running gag here, and, depending on where you are in his story, may stand for "Leader," "Looking," "Live," or "Liar.") Beneath a series of play-school arches of pink, yellow, blue, and green, with a castle and a rainbow visible in the background, a cast of ten children, mostly under the age of eleven, tell the tale of the making of Scientology—a cult of paradise regained. "Now the sun will shine/And we'll be just fine/Now we have got the science of the mind," they sing.

If the kids were good actors—they're not—the show wouldn't be as funny. Every mispronounced word, every scratched nose, every forgotten line, every wandering eye only adds to the high-camp trivialization of Hubbard. The show also parodies Broadway's penchant for extravaganza with its own ingenuous narrative shorthand. For instance, while simulating the Second World War, in which Hubbard almost dies, the actors come to the front of the stage and cut to the chase. "World War II was really bad!" they shout. And when Tom Cruise (Sean Moran) is called to testify on L. Ron's behalf, he holds a brown-haired hand puppet high above his head; it's Katie Holmes. "I love Tom *sooo* much," she says. "And I love silent birth."

The show imparts a lot of information. We learn about E-meters, auditing, and the actual questions that the Scientologists use to discern changes in spiritual energy ("Do you smile much? Are you a slow eater? Do children irritate you?"). At one point, two conjoined children—representing the Analytic and the Reactive Minds—enter and sing about their difference. The Analytic Mind is rational and clear; the Reactive Mind holds fear and memory. "The way to solve your problems/Is to remove that part today," the Analytic Mind sings. "Say, 'Get out, Reactive Mind'/And send it all away." The Reactive Mind is then pushed roughly offstage. This crude scene makes a provocative point: Scientology pushes away memory, fear, guilt, and grief in an attempt to build a sort of internal Eden for its believers, where loss is unknown, or, at least, unseen. I'm not sure that the child actors here understand what they're singing, which is, of course, part of the fun for the audience. I particularly liked Hudson Cianni, playing the Chinese monk whom Hubbard consulted in his search for the meaning of life; he performed his role well, not as an Asian but as a wisecracking Indian. The angel with a halo perpetually bobbing above her head (Elizabeth Lynn) also made me smile. She struggled bravely to remember her lines—a sign, perhaps, that her brain was clear. ♦

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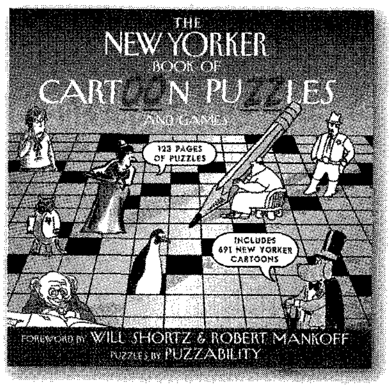
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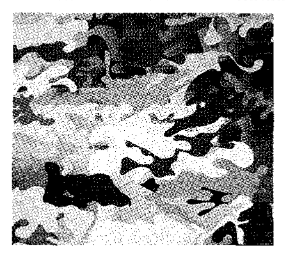

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POP MUSIC

COKE IS IT

Rap's drug obsession.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In September, the magazine *W* announced that cocaine is again a fashionable vice. In pop music, cocaine never went away. Even if some people cluck disapprovingly, most accept the tendency of pop stars to use drugs—to fuel creativity, calm nerves, and liquidate record-company advances. When Keith Richards fell out of a coconut tree in Fiji last April and injured his head, the incident was greeted by jokes about whether there was much left inside his skull to harm. TV shows like VH1's "Behind the Music" thrive on stories of musicians on drug binges, snorting lines off recording-studio consoles. This fall, Eric Clapton, who has been sober for years, decided to reinstate "Cocaine," the louche hit song from his 1977 album "Slowhand," in his live set.

What is a life-style choice in pop is a livelihood in hip-hop. Almost every m.c. raps about selling cocaine, whether he's a veteran like Jay-Z, who likes to invoke his stint as a teen-age dealer, or a newcomer like Rick Ross, who built his 2006 début album, "Port of Miami," around the conceit of being the biggest coke dealer in town. Two hip-hop acts, Clipse and Young Jeezy, rap about dealing more than about anything else, and their music has prompted critics to christen a new subgenre: cocaine rap. Clipse is Gene (Malice) and Terrence (Pusha T) Thornton, a pair of brothers from Virginia, whose brilliantly terse and abrasive second album, "Hell Hath No Fury," came out last month; Young Jeezy is a twenty-eight-year-old from Atlanta, whose woozy and uneven second album, "The Inspiration," was released last week. These m.c.s boast of their skill as salesmen, not of their lives as partygoers.

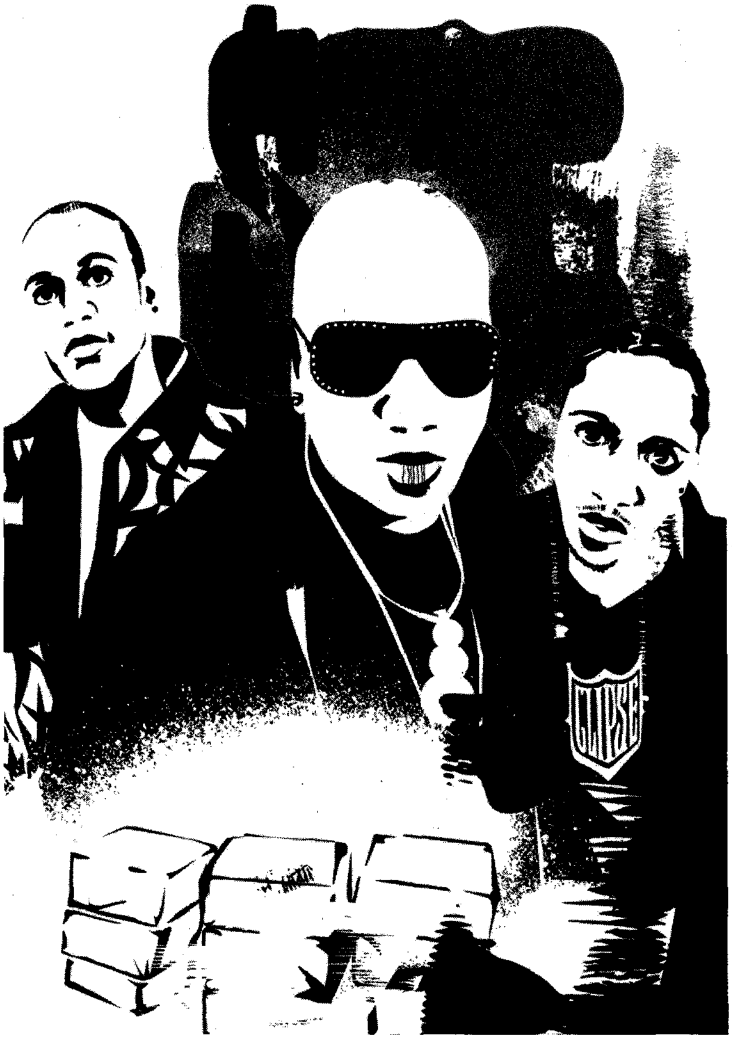
In the early nineties, rappers tried to placate moralists by trotting out set pieces about pitiable crackheads, a gesture about as effective as hanging a "No Smoking" sign outside an office building. Clipse and Young Jeezy don't bother with cautionary tales, though the Thornton brothers do apologize for their lawlessness on a skipping track called "Momma, I'm So Sorry." The song is punctuated by whimsical puffs of a chord organ and a reference to the drug-busting detectives from "Miami Vice": "Momma, I'm so sorry I'm so obnoxious. I don't fear Tubbs and Crockett."

Drug dealing is a cryptic presence in cocaine rap, alluded to by dozens of synonyms and euphemisms but rarely by name. Many listeners will grasp the meaning of "snow." (Young Jeezy's nickname is the Snowman. When his logo, three stacked spheres, began appearing on high schoolers' T-shirts last year, anti-drug groups complained and school districts banned the shirts.) But what about "keys" (kilos of cocaine); "trap house" (a place where cocaine is cooked into crack); "fishscale" (uncut cocaine); "triple beam" (a scale used to weigh the drug); "work," "weight," and "birds" (terms for parcels of cocaine)? In these songs, bricks, squares, pies, stones, and yams are coke, and the cooking, mixing, and weighing required to prepare the drug for clients becomes the inspiration for often inscrutable wordplay. As the Thorntons rap on a track called "Wamp Wamp," "Mildewish, I heat it, it turns gluish. It cools to a tight wad; the Pyrex is Jewish. I get paper, it seems I get foolish. Take it to Jacob and play, 'Which hue's the bluest?'"

Hip-hop has always been driven by an imperative to employ the most vibrant words possible; cocaine rap takes this command to an inventive extreme. Young Jeezy and Clipse want to boast about flouting the law and at the same time protect themselves from potential prosecution. ("Take it out the wrap; then I put it on the scale, but keep that on the low, 'cause I ain't tryin' to go to jail," Young Jeezy raps on the track "Keep It Gangsta.") The result is complex poetry: songs that simultaneously broadcast and hide their meaning.

Young Jeezy became popular in 2005, eventually selling 1.7 million copies of his major-label début album, "Let's Get It: Thug Motivation 101," according to Nielsen SoundScan. "Go Crazy," a song with verses about "cooking them o's"—ounces—was the album's first single. If you were teaching a high-school English class and looking for examples of metaphor and simile, "Go Crazy" would do nicely. The act of processing uncut cocaine inspires a riff on O-shaped objects: "Like Krispy Kremes, I was cookin' them o's. Like horseshoes, I was tossin' them o's." In the chorus, Jeezy sings about making the "dope boys go crazy"; he could be boasting about his music's effect on his fans, describing competitiveness among drug venders, or resurrecting the eighties meaning of "dope" as slang for "good."

On "The Inspiration," Jeezy raps over thick, simple music generated by synthesizers. It's heavy on strings, and much of it suggests the score of a melodramatic shoot-'em-up in the style of Michael Mann. The songs quote music from the eighties—the title track samples Diana Ross's "Muscles" (swapping out a consonant to become "hustles," naturally)—and the album generally reproduces the decade's aesthetic of grandeur on the cheap.



The m.c.s Clipse and Young Jeezy boast of their skill as dealers.

ULLA PUGGAARD

Establishing criminal bona fides is virtually a required move for a rapper, but the relentlessness of Young Jeezy's boasts is wearying, and ultimately makes him sound insecure. "I'm the motherfucking realest; they liars, they phonies, they fakes; these niggas ain't ever touched the weight," he chants in "The Realest." His hoarse voice is his most appealing asset. He sings with a charismatic swagger but conveys the impression of being slightly lost and worn out. He stretches words out across several beats, turning light interjections, like "yeah" and "that's right," into ominous announcements. The more Jeezy croaks, the more it sounds as though nothing will ever be right in his world.

The Thornton brothers concentrate more on writing arresting couplets than on finding new ways of delivering them. (Pusha T recently told allhiphop.com, a rap Web site, "This rap [today] is very cheap. It's all about charisma more so than lyricism.") The brothers' first hit single, "Grindin'" (2002), established them as grave and exacting artists. Technically, the music—which is provided by the Neptunes, an influential pair of pop-music producers—isn't always music. The harsh drumbeat is punctuated by the sound of what might be a car trunk being slammed, and the only hint of melody is a pinging noise that could be somebody playing a very fast game of Pong. The Thornton brothers rap in forceful monotones, delivering careful, clever lines.

On "Hell Hath No Fury," there is barely a gratuitous word or noise. The album is only forty-nine minutes long—many rap CDs are seventy minutes—and, like a slap of rubbing alcohol, it is invigorating and impossible to ignore. "Ride Around Shining," one of the album's most bracing songs, features a small drum pattern that could have been lifted from an early-eighties rap record, and what sounds like an object being dragged across the exposed strings of a grand piano—as if John Cage had wandered into the studio. "While I'm shoveling the snow, man, call me Frosty," Pusha T raps.

"Dirty Money" is as close to a summation of cocaine rap as we have. The lyrics, apparently about a drug dealer whose girlfriend is giving him a hard time about his occupation, defends his ill-gotten gain: "Long as I'm nice with the flame and the flask, I don't mind keeping you up on the must-haves. Peep-toe pumps, Gucci slouch bag—now tell me, is that dirty money really that bad?" It's not much of a defense, but the lyrics are so playful and unexpected that it hardly matters. The drug dealer in the song is trying not just to reassure his girlfriend but to cook crack and count money, too: "3-D faces on them crisp new billies got Benjy looking all googly-eyed and silly." We may never know what the Thorntons really think about cocaine's effect on the world, but we can hear what it does to their words.♦

THE ART WORLD

TEMPTATIONS OF THE FAIR

Miami virtue and vice.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

In contemporary art, this is the decade of the fair, as the nineties were the decade of the biennial. Collectors, with piles of money, have displaced curators, with institutional clout, as arbiters of how new art becomes known and rated, and therefore of what it can mean: less and less, after qualifying as the platonic consumer good. The situation was vivid at the recent, fifth annual Art Basel Miami Beach—so named by its founder, Samuel Keller, the director of the long-established Art Basel, in Switzerland. It was crazy fun. Close to two hundred top and/or trendy galleries (the best, Keller said, of six hundred and fifty applicants), from thirty-two countries, had spaces in the Miami Beach Convention Center. About a dozen other, lower-wattage fairs dotted the city. The list of ancillary shows and events was tiring just to read. Then there were the parties. Pretty people of the world were in town with no intention of wasting their vitality on art appreciation. "Art fairs are the new disco," the veteran art journalist and good liver Anthony Haden-Guest said. Sidewalk crowds paraded dreamy fashions. Fair-certified V.I.P.s had fine views of them from inside traffic-jammed, chauffeured cars. Haden-Guest noted that the sponsors of art events used to be companies hard up for respectability, such as Philip Morris; the classy U.B.S., augmented by BMW, Bulgari, and NetJets, backed Miami Basel (the fair's vernacular moniker). There were even artists on hand, as awkwardly interested as cows at a creamery.

Mutual intoxications of art and money come and go. I've witnessed two previous booms and their respective busts: the Pop nineteen-sixties, which collapsed in the long recession of the seventies, and the neo-expressionist eighties, whose prosperity plummeted, anvil fashion, in 1989. In each instance, overnight sensations foundered and a generation of aspiring tyros was more or less extirpated. (They were out of style before the market revived.) But tough economic times nudge artists into ad-hoc communities and foster what-the-hell experimentation. The seventies gave rise to gritty conceptual maneuvers, supported by government and foundation grants, nonprofit institutions, and a few heroically, or masochistically, committed collectors. The nineties were dominated by festivalism: theatrical, often politically attitudinizing installations that were made to order for a spreading circuit of international shows and contemporary museums and *Kunsthallen*. I disliked the nineties. I knew what all the righteously posturing art was for, but not whom it was for. It invoked a mythical audience, whose supposed assumptions were supposedly challenged. I missed the erotic clarity of commerce—I give you this, you give me that—and was glad when creative spunk started leeching back into unashamedly pleasurable forms. Then came this art-industrial frenzy, which turns mere art lovers into gawking street urchins. Drat.

Fairism (if you will) is inexorable, given today's proliferation of galleries (hundreds in New York's Chelsea alone). No one with anything else to do can more than sample the panoply. "Fairs are important for big galleries," the gallerist Marian Goodman said to me. "For small galleries, they're vital." I asked many dealers how much of their annual income comes through fairs. Answers varied from ten per cent to "well over half," spiking in the range of a third. Beyond that, nonparticipation may be suicidal, risking losses not only of revenue but of artists whose loyalty depends on how gamely they are promoted. The dealer Brooke Alexander said, "The art world is so event-driven these days that if you don't take part in the major fairs you almost don't exist in the public mind." ("Major" includes the original Basel; Frieze, in London; and New York's Armory show, with ARCO, in Madrid, and FIAC, in Paris, close behind.) Another goad to fairism is the accelerating encroachment of auction houses on the contemporary market, competing with galleries for choice works and pacesetting sales. Amy Cappellazzo, who is in charge of contemporary art at Christie's, crowed in a recent interview, "We're the big-box retailer putting the mom-and-pops out of business." Fairs give the little stores conglomerate muscle.

The typical contemporary-art object, judging from Miami Basel, is well crafted, attractive, interesting enough, and portable. It may be figurative or abstract and in any conceivable medium: a pleasantly ungainly painting by Peter Doig, a tiny sculpture by Tom Friedman, a video stunt by Tony Oursler. Not only is there no leading style; there is no noticeable friction between one style and another. These impressions might fade if you focussed on any particular work, but fairs destroy focus. Thousands of works coexisted cozily in Miami, sharing a pluralism of the salable. Talent counts; ideas are immaterial. Exactly one work drew raves from art people who still crave audacity: the New York dealer Gavin Brown left his large space almost bare but for a crumpled cigarette pack (Camels, perhaps to evoke the Middle East), which, attached by a fishing line to an apparatus high overhead, slowly and hypnotically flew above or skittered along the floor. Conceived by the Swiss artist Urs Fischer, this squandering of prime showroom real estate on the trashed container of an addictive product was a smart insult to the occasion, though an awfully mild one. (The piece sold for a hundred and sixty thousand dollars.) A decade ago, much new art was eyebrow-deep in critical theory. Now it seems as carefree as a summertime schoolboy, while far better dressed. I found relief from the convention center's crushing elegance at the alternative fairs—with names like NADA, Pulse, and Aqua—where galleries featured the scrappily zestful ingenuity of kids who haven't had time to forget why they became artists: for joy, revenge, and camaraderie. Drawing and language were common, and there were arresting sentiments. "My utopia hates your utopia," from a busy picture by the New Yorker David Scher, at NADA, stuck in my mind.

To delay the stupor of overstimulation at Miami Basel, I set out to assemble an imaginary collection of one work I liked from each gallery. Then I realized that I could as easily afford the contents of the Louvre. Meanwhile, folks were parting with hundreds of thousands, or millions, of actual dollars for this or that Andy Warhol, Lucian Freud, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Bruce Nauman, or Cindy Sherman, not to mention the odd Picasso or de Kooning. It seemed that almost everyone was selling out of almost everything. "It's incredible. No one questions price. They pay whatever is asked," said a dealer friend who, with a discretion that used to be common in the art dodge, requested anonymity. Who are the collectors? Hedge-fund wizards are routinely mentioned. So are cohorts of Europeans, Russians, Asians, and Latin Americans. The startling costliness of recent art from China, much of it pretty bad, proves that the market is international as never before. People who were eager to deny the obvious—that the runup in art prices is a bubble headed for a spectacular correction—all cited this factor to me. I countered with a little fantasy: One day, perhaps soon, someone in a convivial group of money guys at a bar will say, "I just got back from [name of art fair]. It was fantastic!" Another will drawl, "You still into that?" In the ensuing embarrassed silence, the bubble won't burst; it will vanish.

The fifth annual Art Basel Miami Beach. One dealer says, "Fairs are important for big galleries. For small galleries, they're vital."

MITCHELL ZACHS / AP

Fashion victims and pure speculators aside—their number will be immediately evident when the market stumbles—there are serious collectors whose absorption in art transcends their holdings and justifies personal wealth as a force in culture, one that is quicker and sharper than the committee labors of institutions. The best show in Miami was "Red Eye," a brilliantly curated roundup of recent art—paintings, sculpture, installations, and video—from Los Angeles, at the Rubell Family Collection. (Donald and Mera Rubell are former New Yorkers and hoteliers—Don is the brother of the late Steve Rubell—who have collected art avidly since the eighties.) The show, which will be up through the spring, posits a blooming tradition of gorgeous and impolite styles keyed to psychosocial provocations in works by Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Charles Ray, Barbara Kruger, Raymond Pettibon, and Jim Shaw. I hadn't heard of nearly half the artists (nor had some Southern Californians I consulted). Most of them seemed distinctive and strong, building a case whose relative cogency remains to be decided but which gives traction to aesthetic discernment and critical intelligence. Money, like virtue, is as it does. ♦

From the West Lebanon (N.H.) Valley News.

A four week program sponsored by the Dartmouth XC Ski Center designed for the X-C or alpine skier that wants to try Back Country skiing. Classes will be held on Tuesday mornings from 9:30 to 11, January 10 through January 31. Telemark skis, boots, and poles are provided. Cast is $85.00.

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

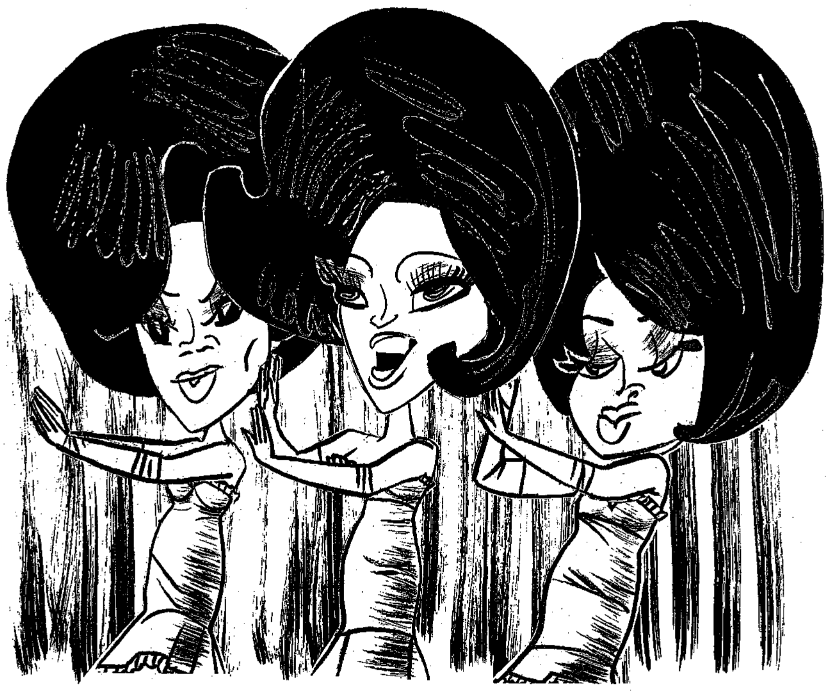
BEST AND BRIGHTEST

"Dreamgirls" and "The Good Shepherd."

BY DAVID DENBY

Near the beginning of Bill Condon's movie adaptation of the musical "Dreamgirls," Jimmy Early (Eddie Murphy), a soul singer loosely based on James Brown, meets his three new backup singers: Effie (Jennifer Hudson), Deena (Beyoncé Knowles), and Lorrell (Anika Noni Rose). Jimmy, eager to score with all of them, gets down on his knees in mock submission. "Exactly what would you like Jimmy to do for you?," he asks. The youngest, Lorell, giggling with excitement, says, "You could teach us the song." Moving to a piano backstage, Jimmy begins "Fake Your Way to the Top," one of the many fast-boiling numbers that the composer Henry Krieger and the lyricist Tom Eyen wrote for the original show, which was directed and choreographed by Michael Bennett and opened on Broadway twenty-five years ago this month. As Eddie Murphy begins singing, a pianist takes his seat, and Murphy walks in front of the instrument and cues each of the girls to sing the decorative backup line, "round and round"—Anika Noni Rose in her giddy high soprano, Beyoncé Knowles in a softer, tamer style, and Jennifer Hudson in a throaty, deep mezzo that leaps into an exultant riff. Murphy whirls around, and suddenly, without any transition, he's onstage, before an audience, doing the song with the three girls singing nearby.

The sigh you will hear across the country in the next few weeks is the sound of a gratified audience: a great movie musical has been made at last. For me, and perhaps for many others, the Oscar-winning "Chicago," with its overwrought heave and strain, its dancing bodies broken into piston-thrust fragments, wasn't even close to the real thing. "Dreamgirls" is a singing, not a dancing, musical, so Condon, who wrote "Chicago" (and who directed "Gods and Monsters" and "Kinsey") is never tempted to break bodies into pieces. In any case, we can tell from the easy fluency of the movie that his basic urge is to merge and join things, not to separate them. Again and again, he lets a declaration of love, an argument, a music-business event flow directly into the next moment, and then into the next, in an exhilarating organic structure with liquid joints. "Dreamgirls" is a barely disguised account of Berry Gordy and the rise of the Supremes; it features some brief, crisply written expository passages and several photo-montage sequences that detail the emergence of black artists as a major commercial force in American music of the nineteen-sixties—all seen against a background of the Detroit riots and the civil-rights movement. But, apart from these episodes, just about everything is sung, and, in this movie, the songs aren't merely commentary on the narrative and the personal conflicts; they *are* the narrative and the drama—a rousing success story that is also (though we don't realize it right away) a parallel story of failure.



Anika Noni Rose, Beyoncé Knowles, and Jennifer Hudson in Bill Condon's movie.

TOM BACHTELL

When we first see Curtis Taylor, Jr. (the Berry Gordy character, played by Jamie Foxx), he's a hustler with pomaded hair and a roving eye who's lounging backstage at a talent show. Quickly, he aces out an aging manager (Danny Glover) and takes command of the three girls, their songwriter, C.C. (Keith Robinson), and Jimmy, too. Curtis softens and homogenizes the girls' sound, dresses them in elaborate wigs, white satin dresses with trumpet hems, and elbow-length gloves, and creates a sparkling landscape of light around them. He succeeds in leading them out of the wilderness of R. & B. and into the promised land of the pop charts. But one of the girls doesn't fit—the beautiful but oversized Effie, the lead singer with a big voice and a bigger mouth. When Curtis replaces her as the lead with the demure Deena, she explodes, and the movie reaches a sustained peak with two long, interlocked numbers: "It's All Over," in which Effie holds out against no fewer than four characters, singly and in pairs, the group breaking apart and reforming again and again; and then the song that stopped the show on Broadway, "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going," performed by Effie alone. Jennifer Hudson, the young singer who was voted off "American Idol" for the same reasons that Effie gets tossed out of the group here, begins quietly and reaches a pitch of wailing defiance that goes on forever. As a piece of singing, this performance is intentionally over the top—ex-

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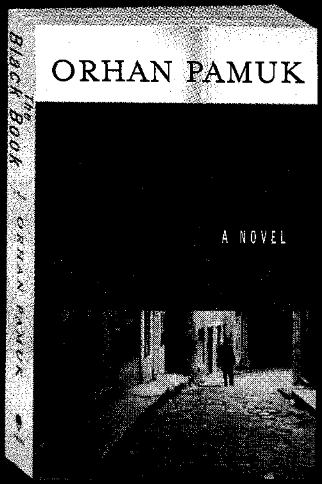
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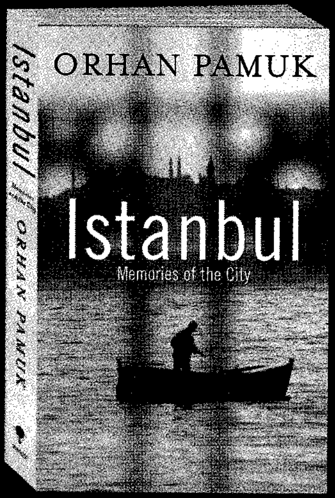
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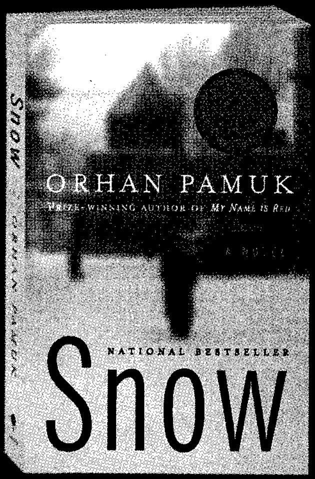
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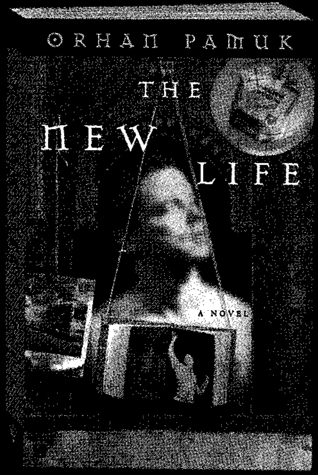
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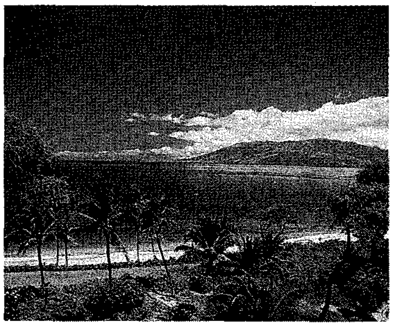

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citing but almost scary in its intensity.

Effie is gone but not forgotten: she will sing better than ever, and in her own soulful, all-out style, which is radically different from the processed technique and commercial-dance-music rhythms of the revamped Dreamgirls. At the same time, Beyoncé Knowles's Deena, whom we had hardly noticed before, moves into the center of the movie. Deena is based, of course, on that glamorous imp Diana Ross, and the long-waisted, utterly beautiful Knowles gets photographed, as Ross did, in an infinite number of extravagant costumes and hairdos. The Dreamgirls, with their polished routines that appeal to white audiences, go through the roof, and Deena becomes a diva, an icon, an image with little sense of her own reality. Curtis had chosen her as the lead precisely because her singing was bland, and, at first, she plays along, singing well but without individuality. But when Deena decides to break away from Curtis, Knowles, without much makeup, her long hair hanging straight down, sings an anthem of liberation called "Listen" with shattering power. Knowles can do anything she wants musically; her acting is still rudimentary, but she has the presence and the talent to spark a serious revival of film musicals. Foxx, keeping his voice low, extends his range as the cruelly manipulative Curtis, but the highest acting honors go to Eddie Murphy. His Jimmy, a screamer who loves to throw himself down onstage, tries to go sweet and soft, like Johnny Mathis, but can't do it and falls apart in public. Jimmy has a puzzled desperation that Murphy has never demonstrated before.

Throughout "Dreamgirls," Condon pursues two tracks: he celebrates the chart-topping success of groups like the Supremes, but he makes it clear that what they have achieved, however exciting, is not the same thing as artistic success. Effie, too idiosyncratic for pop, remains the artist. "Dreamgirls" fulfills the ecstatic promise inherent in all musicals—that life can be dissolved into song and dance—but it does so without relinquishing the toughest estimate of how money and power work in the real world that song and dance leave behind.

In Robert De Niro's "The Good Shepherd"—one of the most impressive movies ever made about espionage—the hero, Edward Wilson (Matt Damon), who becomes an agent in the O.S.S. during the Second World War and then a higher-up in the C.I.A., goes through life with just a single hobby. He spends hours placing ships in tiny bottles. A precise, selfless, and stolid man who speaks as little as possible, he rides a Washington bus each morning in a standard-issue raincoat and a gray hat, apparently just another government employee heading to work. Wilson is shrewd but entirely without humor—a joke, after all, might give something away. Sex is also out of the question. Every time he makes love to a woman—indeed, any time anybody makes love in this movie—the result is a disaster, for sex is an unguarded expression of self that can reveal secrets or leave one open to blackmail. Wilson is a superb functionary of the American colossus that grew out of the war, during that serious time when East Coast Wasp aristocrats—Dean Acheson, George Kennan, John J. McCloy, and others—appointed themselves guardians of the nation. This movie, which the screenwriter, Eric Roth, struggled to get made for years, is a sharply knowing social history of the C.I.A. and also a melancholy account of the hollowing out of one of its key players. (Wilson appears to be an amalgam of James Jesus Angleton and Richard Bissell.) Moving backward and forward in time, and netted with an intricate array of hints, secrets, warnings, and echoes, the story of Edward Wilson is the narrative embodiment of paranoia.

Just after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, in April, 1961, an intentionally slurred audiotape of a couple making love, accompanied by an indistinct photograph, is deposited under Wilson's door. The evidence—or whatever it is—may contain a clue to why Fidel Castro's forces knew in advance where the invaders were landing. As in a John le Carré novel, Wilson is being tantalized with fragments. Someone in a foreign intelligence service is presenting him with a riddle whose solution will draw him out of his Washington fortress and expose and destroy him. As the material is enlarged, altered, and repeatedly analyzed, the filmmakers fly back through time, to 1939, when the young Wilson, after a sterling rendition of Gilbert and Sullivan's "I'm Called Little Buttercup," in drag, is inducted into Yale's Skull and Bones society, a kind of mystic brotherhood that humiliates its inductees and excludes everyone else. From this group of young gents General Bill Sullivan (i.e., "Wild Bill" Donovan, the founder of the O.S.S.), played by De Niro, recruits his men. (Jews, Catholics, and Negroes need not apply.) Wilson jumps into marriage with a socially prominent young woman (Angelina Jolie), only to leave her for six years of service in London and postwar Berlin, where he works with a British agent (Billy Crudup) modelled on Kim Philby—a man of immense charm who turns espionage into an amusing dance of treachery. In Skull and Bones, and then in the agency, Wilson is imbued with the fraternal virtues of loyalty and trust. But the operational truth of espionage is the opposite—the most intricate and savage betrayal. If necessary, in this movie intelligence services will kill their own agents when they know too much.

"The Good Shepherd" has a reticent beauty (the colors are subdued and blended) and a sombre exactitude that gives way, now and then, to episodes of anguished emotion. Like Al Pacino in "The Godfather II," Matt Damon recedes further and further into himself; his Wilson is as much a victim as a hero, a man who can't, or won't, protect those closest to him. A good part of the time, he operates in a fog of surmise and unprovable suspicion. For spies, particularly for moles and double agents, time is meaningless, since the job of penetrating another country's secret service may take a decade or more to pay off. Something a man says to Wilson—a bit of chatter, an inadvertence—may mean nothing when he hears it but a great deal a dozen years later; the movie sews these moments together, and when the pattern becomes clear we are both impressed and chilled. De Niro has directed only one movie in the past—"A Bronx Tale"—but long stretches of this one are masterly: swift, terse, but never rushed.

In crass operational terms, the C.I.A. shown here wins a few (overthrowing a popular leftist leader in South America) and loses a few (the Bay of Pigs). The movie firmly plants the suggestion that the agency persistently overestimated Soviet capabilities in order to justify its own existence. But "The Good Shepherd" won't ask the ultimate question: Would the Cold War have come out any differently if hundreds of agents on both sides hadn't been killed? Isn't espionage just a closed, circulatory activity for debonair thugs—intellectuals with a sense of danger and an inordinate capacity for deception? They all seem to be making ships in a bottle, which is not quite the same thing as launching a fleet of seaworthy craft. ♦

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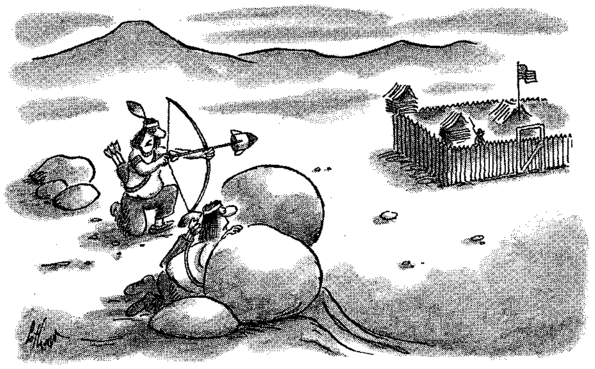
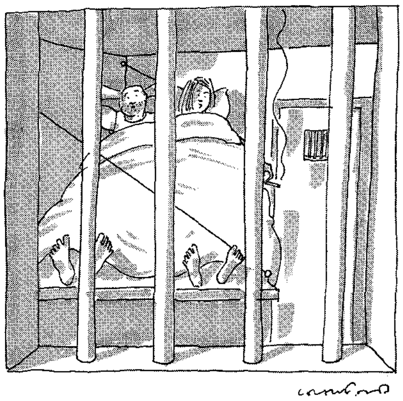


"It better work—they sold it to us."
Paul Denning, San Francisco, Calif.



THE FINALISTS

"How about we just stay in tonight?"
David Ruebeck, Minneapolis, Minn.

"Ever think about kids?"
Katherine Freygang, Cornwall, Conn.

"My mother is coming to stay next week."
John Mahoney, Excelsior, Minn.

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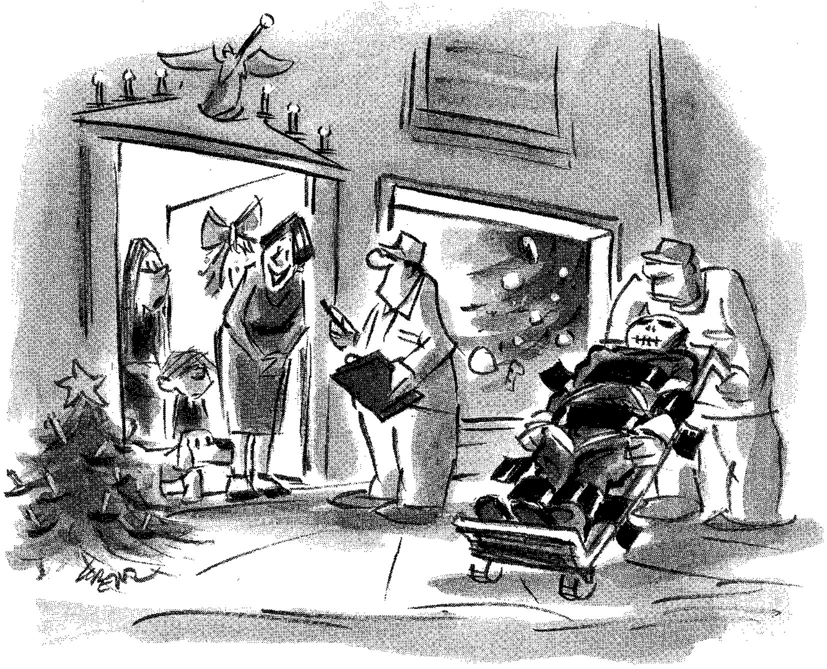

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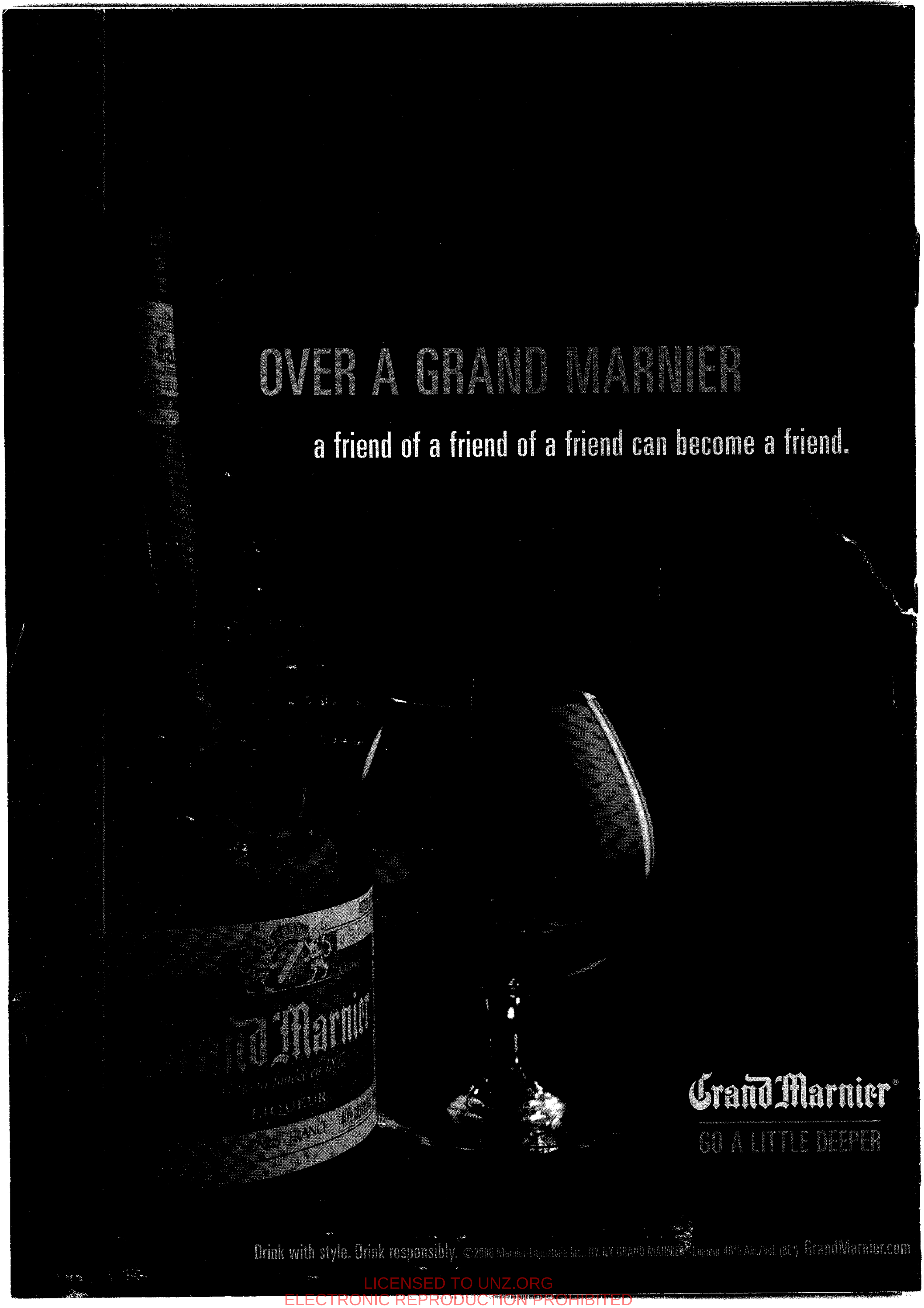
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